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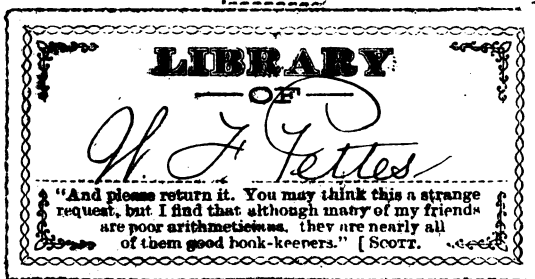
SOTTIE LADIES IN HASTE



ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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SOME LADIES IN HASTE





SOME LADIES IN HASTE





"He . . . blew his whole love-smitten soul into the fife."

SOME LADIES IN HASTE



By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

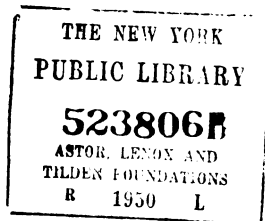
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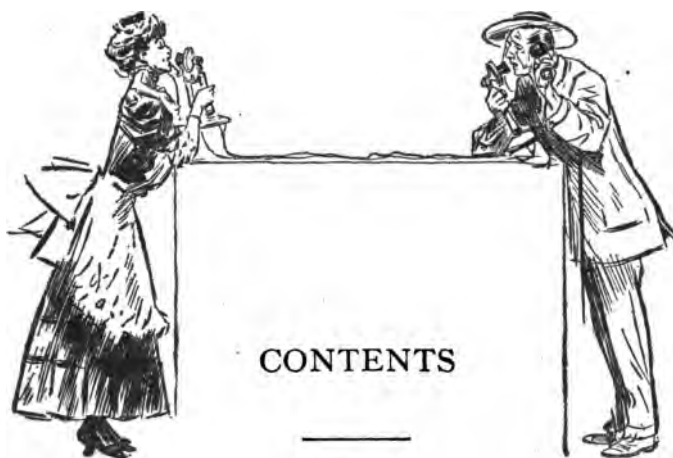


Published May, 1908

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TO MY FRIEND
ARTHUR DILLON
IN MEMORY OF THE
OLD DAYS
WHEN NOBODY WAS IN
A HURRY





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SOME LADIES IN HASTE

CHAPTER I

THE MISCHIEF-MAKER



ANNERS was waiting as Kelvin came in, keeping his appointment to the minute.

They greeted each other simply and sincerely, and for an instant Manners's lean, attractive features lighted up. Then the expression of perplexity returned; he raised his glass, rattled the ice in it, found it empty, and glanced across at young Kelvin, who nodded.

"Two more, then," said Manners to the club servant who answered the pressure of his walking stick on the electric button. And, to Kelvin, "It is a very warm morning," he remarked politely.

"It is more than warm, it is hot," observed Kelvin. And, after a decorous pause: "You say you have something not entirely agreeable to confide to me, William?"

"I—well, it depends on what you consider disagreeable. By the way, what on earth have you stuffed into your coat pockets? They're all bulging out of shape."

Kelvin reddened and muttered something unintelligible; then, with a trace of irritation:

"What's this unpleasant matter you wish to discuss? I'm rather in a hurry, William."

Manners gave a slight start. "Certainly," he said; "I am going to tell you the whole thing. I—I hate to do it, but I'll have to, sooner or later, because"—and the worried expression came into his face again—"because it so vitally affects—ah—several people."

"Me?" asked the other anxiously.

Manners produced a freshly ironed handkerchief, shook out the folds, and picking up

his single eyeglass from the string where it dangled began to polish it. Once or twice he held it up to squint through it.

"I'd better begin at the beginning, hadn't I?" he asked, with a nonchalance plainly assumed.

"Naturally, unless you're a Chinaman," said Kelvin uneasily.

"Very well, then; the whole thing began when I went—" He stopped abruptly. "But you didn't know about that, did you?"

"About what?" snapped Kelvin.

"About where I went?"

"When?"

"Th—that time——"

"What time?" demanded Kelvin, in growing apprehension. "Look here, William, you're getting on my nerves. Are you afraid to tell me about this matter which you say concerns me?"

"No, I'm not afraid—I mean, I'm not very much afraid of you. So I went there—but you didn't know about that, did you?"

"Know about what?" demanded the other, exasperated.

"Why, about my going to Dr. Duncan's Sanatorium."

"No, I didn't. What did you go for?"

"I went," said Manners, "because I was smoking too much. I tried to break off—found it hard, got several kinds of fidgets, and then it occurred to me that it would be easier for somebody else to take the trouble to cure me than for me to bother about curing myself. Of course I'd heard of Dr. Duncan. Everybody has. Even you have, haven't you?"

"Of course," muttered Kelvin, who had heard nothing of the sort.

"Well, I'd read something about the treatment of disease by hypnotism and mental suggestion. Everybody is discussing it these days, though it's an old story in Europe, where the most celebrated scientists have been for years reporting marvelous discoveries and amazing cures." His rising inflection made it a question. Kelvin nodded wisely, and the other continued:

"You know how it's been here in America; fear of ridicule and hidebound professional conservatism have prevented our physicians from experimenting or attempting to practice it. Duncan is the only eminent man in his profession who has been brave enough

to take it up. Be patient, Eric; I'm coming to your case presently."

Manners removed his monocle in order to see more clearly what expressions were chasing themselves over Kelvin's disconcerted countenance.

"What do you mean by *my* case?" demanded Kelvin. "What have I to do with this dinky affair?"

But Manners ignored the question and an offered cigar with a troubled sigh, and, as Kelvin set fire to his own cigar, he went on:

"Dr. Duncan has worked miracles in mental suggestion. He has cured the intemperate, he has corrected the moral equilibrium, made bad people good, restored to sanity the mentally stricken. Think of that, Eric!"

"I am. What of it?"

"This, that, although he performs modern mysteries and miraculous marvels, his magic is purely scientific; he reasons coolly; he operates with nothing more occult than common sense. Clear, cold reason is Duncan's only assistant. There's no use of anybody shouting 'Mountebank!' at him; he's one of the most widely known and most highly respected physicians in active practice; an au-

thor of a dozen scientific works which have been crowned by the French Academy and praised by scientists the world over; a lecturer at Oxford, the Sorbonne, and Harvard. And, Eric——”

“What?”—sullenly puffing his cigar.

“He not only cured me of that vile habit of smoking, which I notice you still indulge in, but he did it by absent treatment.”

“You mean he sat in his office and worked a sort of mental rabbit foot on you?—a kind of hoodoo on your smoking while you went about town on your own affairs?”

“Exactly. I, as you say, strolled about, not concerning myself with any part of the treatment, but in a day or two I began to find that I didn’t like to smoke. That’s what he did to me.”

“By just—just thinking about you at so much a think?” asked Kelvin flippantly.

“Precisely. And I was so pleased that I took another course from him. That was where trouble began. I had him treat me for mental vacuity. And look at me now! Why, Eric, my head is full of thoughts—simply swarming with all kinds of bright ideas.”

"You mean to say that he did this for you?" jeered Kelvin, unconvinced.

"He certainly did," said Manners modestly. "The first thing I noticed I began to exhibit faint traces of intelligence. About a fortnight later I had incubated and hatched an original idea, and, when I had found that an idea or two relieved the pressure on the mental vacuum, I began to wonder about all that business of thought transmission and mental influence, the same old thing that has been thrashed out by everybody—even by you, it appears."

He waved his monocle and looked wearily at Kelvin.

"Same old thing," he said apologetically, "but vitally interesting to me because I'd just been treated. So I got some of Duncan's books and read 'em; thought a little, went and got some more books; thought a little more, went to Columbia University to hear some lectures——"

"You!"—in derision.

"Ya-as. And one day, sitting in this same foolish club window, the knob of my stick under my chin, I began to wonder whether I couldn't do a few stunts myself—particularly

in that matter of mental influence exercised upon somebody at a distance. I thought what a help I might be to you, for example."

Kelvin sought his glass with unsteady fingers. "Go on," he said.

"So," continued Manners simply, "I tried it—on several people—various things on various people——"

"Friends?" demanded Kelvin in some excitement.

"Some were friends—fellows I knew. Some were—ah—strangers—several pretty girls whom I noticed through the windows. It was a bright spring morning. I saw a number of agreeable girls on Fifth Avenue—one in particular curiously resembled—ah—a very charming girl I admire exceedingly——"

"Do you mean to say that you attempted your infernal mental experiments on several attractive girls with whom you have no personal acquaintance?" demanded Kelvin. And, as Manners winced, "Have you any reason to believe you have succeeded?" he insisted.

"Probably—if I may judge from what my mental experiments are now doing to several men of my acquaintance."

"W-what—what are you making them do?"

"Various things," admitted Manners, furtively watching his shocked friend. "I—well—such personal qualities as it appeared to me they lacked I attempted to instill into them. For instance, one energetic but perfectly commonplace young business man I thought needed an injection of devil-may-care romance to leaven him. So I concentrated my intellectual processes on his case; I gave him vigorous absent treatment—he was at the Stock Exchange at the time. He didn't know what was happening to him."

"And what happened?" said Kelvin.

Manners shook his head: "You ought to see him now. He's trying to become engaged to almost any girl he meets."

"What!" cried Kelvin, horrified.

Manners looked nervously around, but they were quite alone in the room. Then his glance returned to his friend:

"He's quite dippy on romance. Isn't it shocking? Wants to wed almost anything he encounters. I—I overdid it, you see; the treatment was too vigorous. But I didn't know; I'd had no experience. Besides, I

really hadn't the faintest notion that I possessed such a power; and—and first I knew I found I'd suddenly grasped something out of nothing; something as unexpected as a live wire! And, Eric, there I was amazed, pleased with myself, half doubting, blundering in my experiments with this stupendous living power which I never dreamed I possessed——”

“Heavens, William,” faltered Kelvin, “this is a murderous confession you are making!”

Manners dropped one lank leg over the other, where it hung dangling, and, removing the monocle from his left eye, examined it with desperate indifference.

“The most serious phase of the affair is yet to be confessed—to you. Do you think you can stand any more, Eric?”

“I?” repeated Kelvin nervously. “Oh, I can stand it all right, but I'm wondering how these miserable victims of yours are going to stand it!”

“So am I,” said Manners. “I'm sure I don't know what to do for them.”

“Can't you stop it?”

“Ya-as, I can stop it—that is, I can re-

frain from doing anything—ah—further in that line.”

Kelvin shuddered; Manners was aware of the spasm, and his features became troubled.

“I can, of course, stop my experiments,” he went on slowly, “but I can’t undo what I’ve done——”

“Why not?”

“Because,” replied Manners naïvely, “I don’t know how.”

“But what on earth will happen to your victims?” demanded Kelvin. “What’s happening to ’em now? Manners, you’ve got to do something——”

Manners made a gesture with his monocle. “Do something? What,” he asked wearily, “am I to do? Tell me and I’ll do it. I’ve tried the same sort of thing backward, but it won’t work. I don’t seem to be able to neutralize or modify what I’ve already done. I’ve written Dr. Duncan, but he’s in Japan.”

Kelvin, breathing deeply, said: “I never, *never* supposed you were that sort of a man. You don’t look it,” he added reproachfully. “Why, hang it all, Manners, you—you’re a sort of a—monster!”

"D-don't say that!" protested the other thickly.

"I—what dreadful idea possessed you to try to do such things? I thought I knew you pretty well; I—nobody ever supposed you ever had an original idea. You—you didn't have to be intellectual, you know; everybody liked you well enough as you were——"

"Thanks; it's very good of you," said Manners, despondently staring out of the window into the brilliant sunshine.

Kelvin gazed at him for a moment, striving to realize it all, then hysterically put the wrong end of his cigar into his mouth.

There was some slight confusion; a servant came and mopped up the fragments of broken glasses. When he had retired Kelvin burst out:

"You tell me these incredible things and I try to comprehend them, but it is doing unusual things to my nerves. I'm jumpy, William. And what I want to know immediately is whether you've experimented on anybody besides that Wall Street man. *Have you?*"

"Yes," said Manners.

Kelvin sank back in his chair.

"What else and who else have you done?" he asked.

"Enough," said Manners sadly. "I began with a bunch of five friends of mine. I said to myself, 'You are good fellows, good citizens, commonplace, prevaricating, unimaginative, everyday young Americans, nimbly occupied in acquiring material advantages in a material and sordidly unromantic world.' That's what I said to myself, Kelvin."

"And what did you *do*?" demanded Kelvin in an awful voice.

"Do? Well, I gave them all absent treatment. I treated them according to what I thought they lacked. Into some I injected a mad passion for the unvarnished truth; into some the desire for adventure, the longing for the poetry and romance of life and—and Nature——"

"Who," stammered Kelvin, "are these five betrayed, deluded, defrauded, abandoned friends of yours?" And as Manners fidgeted and attempted to screw his monocle into his left eye: "Who are they, William Manners? And—and"—he continued shakily—"do I know them? Look at me! Tell me! Speak!" he broke out, squirming in all the

torture of uncertainty. "William! William! Am *I* one of those five?"

"Yes," said Manners in the accentless acquiescence of despair. "Isn't it terrible?"

"For *what* part have you picked me?" almost shouted Kelvin in his terror and bewilderment. "What have you turned me into?—confound you! I—I knew darned well there was something wrong with me; I wondered why I'd been growing pansies in dinky pots and chloroforming butterflies and feeding those silly dickey birds in the park with my pockets stuffed with stale bread! I thought it might be softening of the brain, and—and it's *you*."

"Yes, old chap," said Manners, humble in his guilt.

"Well—good Heavens!—well, can't you turn it off? Can't you stop me reading Nature books? I'm writing one, too. Can't you prevent me? Can't you do something?" insisted Kelvin, almost beside himself with fury. "What business have I turning over stones to hunt for beetles and spiders? What do I want to dig up daisies for and look at the useless things through a magnifying glass? And I'm doing it all the time. I'm a plain

business man; I make pulp paper in bulk. Why," he almost snarled, "do I go out to the suburbs and run about with a butterfly net instead of attending to my business? I like the city; I don't like the country. But I can't keep away from it!"

"Is it ruining you?" asked Manners miserably.

"It—no, it isn't. I'm not too feeble-minded to make a living in spite of what you've done to me. But I tell you, William, it's horrible to want to do something sensible and be unable to resist an inclination to go to the park and feed peanuts to the squirrels. And besides, I—I—there's a girl I once saw, . . . and I *don't* like the sort of girl she is. . . . And she's pretty as the mischief. And she studies Nature books, and peeps up into trees when some infernal tomtit begins to pipe up."

"Who is she?" asked Manners in despair.

"I don't know. I don't want to know. She's too pretty and intellectual. Can't you make me stop looking at her? Can't you make her go away?" he insisted, almost frantic.

"Where is she?" asked Manners blankly.

"Where is she? I don't know. But I've

seen her several times when I'm out in the confounded outskirts of civilization, with my pockets full of ferns and forceps and tin boxes crammed with caterpillars. Think of it, William, I, a decent, respectable, city-bred, city-loving business man——"

He almost broke down; Manners, too, was deeply affected.

"That girl," he said unsteadily, "is probably one of the agreeable girls I saw through this window, and whom I chose for my experiments. I'm awfully sorry, old fellow, but *I* haven't a notion who she is—who any of them are. All I did, when an attractive girl came along, was to say to myself: 'Now, *you* are very pretty and delightful to look at, but you probably think trivial thoughts most of the time, and you have been brought up with false notions of the world. Go out and see the sun rise! Go listen to the speckled tomtit! Get busy with Nature and the living romance of the free world! You dance too much; you cultivate too assiduously the comparatively unimportant. Be a real girl—a charming, frank, natural, fearless, disinterested, intelligent girl. Give yourself the sensation of an original idea. Take an interest in

the resources of those simpler pleasures now banned as obsolete by a fretted, pampered, overambitious, and intellectually degenerate society where wealth is——”

“William!”

“What?” he asked guiltily.

“If—if you’ve done all that to those young girls you’ve done a terrible thing!”

“Why?”

“Because you’ve filled their heads with unconventional notions. You make ’em want to go and be dryads in the Bronx and Westchester. And they can’t be unless they transgress every law and rule of feminine training and bringing up. How can they? These hothouse exotics, brought up under glass in the only foreign city in the United States; these pretty heiresses of vulgar millions whose notions of the country are limited to macadamized roads and a touring car, whose aspirations are to dominate and sit lightly enthroned on the spindrift of the social surf——” He broke off, furious with himself for his own flow of metaphor. “You see!” he cried, mad all through, “your absent treatment makes me talk like an accursed literary thing, and not like a man, a

paper manufacturer, and a voter! William, this is a vile, vile business. Within me, welling up, I feel unsuspected springs of poetry. Confound it, I can't even think in decent, self-respecting English. I cogitate in rhythm; I become loquacious in alliteration. I'm not myself. I haven't been for a month. And, look now! I haven't anything to do to-day; I ought to sit here for a while like a human being, then play a game or two of billiards, then lunch comfortably upstairs, then take a drive in my new six-cylinder tourer, then dress and go to see the right sort of woman—or go to a good play—then come here for a cocktail and a rubber, then—O Lord!—and now look at me! *Look!*”

And he pulled from his bulging pockets a lot of bottles and boxes and notebooks crowded with observations upon the nesting habits of the speckled titmouse. “And the worst is that I'm now going, William, going out to chase butterflies, and rush eagerly after every thousand-legged thing that wriggles and crawls. And I'm in a hurry, too. Isn't that the limit? I'm actually impatient to be off, getting my shoes muddy and burs all over me. I don't want to like that girl I

sometimes see doing the same thing, and I'm afraid I'm getting to like to look at her. William! William! Can't you do anything for me?"

"Do you know," said Manners earnestly, "that it's like some dreadful dream—all this that I've somehow managed to do? I can't really believe it; I'm palsied by it. I try to undo it by negative absent treatment. But it doesn't seem to work. Tell me, Kelvin, do—do you notice any amelioration of your condition when I fix my mind on you, and give you negative absent treat——"

"Let me alone!" almost yelled Kelvin. "Don't you dare try anything more; do you hear? I'm bad enough as I am, and if you experiment further you may turn me into almost anything!"

For a moment the two men faced each other—two well-dressed, well-built, attractive young fellows, confronting one another in a corner of one of the most exclusively fashionable of the junior clubs in New York.

And as they stared into each other's eyes the situation seemed too impossible; too absurdly grotesque to be real. Here, in the

daylight of the twentieth century, within a stone's throw of Broadway; here, in all the garish, unshadowed glare of Fifth Avenue, in the most modern, most matter-of-fact of metropolitan centers, where no inhabitant admitted romance could exist either in the city's magnificence or in its degraded squalor; where the only romance understood was the necromancy of wealth and the manipulation of it!

Powerless, inert, Manners sank back into his chair. Kelvin cast one withering glance upon his collapsed friend, then, stuffing bottles, boxes, and notebooks into his pockets, rose, crammed the straw hat firmly over his ears, and turned toward the door.

"W-where are you g-going?" gasped Manners.

"Into the country—dammit!" snarled Kelvin, pausing to turn up his carefully creased trousers.

"Eric! Don't go."

"How can I help it? Do you think I *want* to go?"

"S-shall I detain you by v-violence?" asked Manners anxiously; "shall I hold you, Eric?"

"If you do I'll probably knock your head off."

"But think—think of the danger of b-being stung by bees."

"I do—or by that girl."

"Heavens, Eric! Don't—*don't* be beguiled into wedlock."

"Oh, it's all very well for you to tell me such things—*now*! Anything's likely to happen; I may be attacked by a tadpole or chased by a frog or bitten by that confounded tomtit. But I've got to go, all the same."

Manners sprang forward to seize him, but Kelvin became violent. They stood there, confronting one another, breathing hard. Then:

"Me for the Bronx," said Kelvin sullenly. "Leggo!" And he disappeared through the portals of the Lenox Club.

Manners observed his friend's departure with profound discouragement. Matters were not very well with him these days; things had begun to go wrong in several ways ever since that accursed day when, idling at this very window, he had, without expecting success, ventured to attempt a mental influence

on the first five attractive and unsuspecting maidens who blew breezily by through the pale April sunshine.

How could he doubt that he had vitally influenced them, judging from the cataclysmic effect of his experiments on his friend Kelvin? Alas! what had he driven these innocent victims into—what mad escapades, what mischief, what irrational, unconventional situations!

Miserably, every morning and evening, he scanned the newspapers, fearful lest he come upon some casualty which he must recognize as the dreadful result of his outrageous experiments. Every time any feminine individual did anything reprehensible and the papers reported it, Manners pored over the account in agonized doubt.

But so far he had not recognized his own responsibility in the police reports of the misdeeds of the frail and fair.

The greater part of his leisure was employed in a vigorous mental endeavor to reverse and nullify the mental suggestions which no doubt had worked marvelous change in half a dozen guileless young girls; the remainder of his leisure was taken up

with vain attempts to obtain an interview with the very charming and agreeably frivolous girl to whom he had been engaged—was still engaged to, as he understood it. Yet now, for nearly three months, he had failed to obtain from her more than the briefest replies to his notes, and only the most fugitively formal interviews with her in the presence of her family, or at some crowded function or other. And he was becoming deathly tired of it.

So that afternoon, beautifully arrayed, he sauntered up Fifth Avenue for the purpose of bestowing his society upon her. She lived at present with a doddering aunt, her parents being in Europe. And he had welcomed the situation with pleasure at first; yet, strangely enough, ever since her parents had sailed, he not only had received no replies to notes and telephone calls, but he had never been able to find her at home, and her decrepit aunt never seemed to be able to furnish him with any adequate explanation.

So he was very serious and nervous and preoccupied when he rang the bell at her door that afternoon, and when the servant at the door informed him, as usual, that she was

not at home, a violent desire to yell possessed him.

Baffled, restless, apprehensive, nerves on edge, he returned to the Lenox Club.

"If she doesn't stop this sort of thing—if she doesn't behave more appreciatively toward me," he muttered, "I—I'll try a little absent treatment. I'll give that amazing girl just one more chance at me, just one!"

And as he looked gloomily out of the club window he thought of his awful power, and shuddered.



CHAPTER II

DIANA'S CHASE

WHERE rolls the Bronx athwart the suburban solitudes of Westchester, the traditional pedestrian might have been perceived pursuing an erratic and eccentric course cross lots, and any regularly enrolled member of any rural constabulary might have been pardoned for slinking after him and hiding behind trees to peep out at him, so suspicious were his movements, so furtive, so singularly and utterly devoid of suburban and common sense.

The classical, isolated pedestrian was Kelvin; tin boxes were slung about his person, drooping fronds of uprooted ferns waved pendent from his coat pockets; in one hand he carried a burlap bag containing captured garter snakes; in the other he brandished a green gauze butterfly net; and all over his straw hat were stuck defunct butterflies impaled on pins.

In his thumbs were briars; upon his shoes a deposit of good, thick Westchester mud. Some coyly playful thorn had attempted to detain him by the broader rearward expanse of his trousers; then, plucking him by the elbow, had vindictively given him a parting scratch across the nose.

However, it was evident that he didn't care. Unslaked enthusiasm burned in his eye as he laboriously turned over flat stones in search of beetles and pursued them on all fours as they fled through the grass. Now he explored the shallows of the Bronx for aquatic insects. Now he playfully pounced upon a demented tadpole; anon he gamboled in the wake of some fast-flying dragon fly, net aloft, boisterously excited.

And all the while he was astounded at his

own behavior, ashamed, indignant with himself as he crawled or squatted or careered about the landscape. And all the while he kept one curious and furtive eye upon a moderately distant figure on the other bank of the Bronx—the figure of a young girl who moved leisurely about, a butterfly net balanced across her shoulders, a pair of field glasses slung to swing at her hip.

Askance he could see her very plainly across the water, an attractive, fresh-skinned, dark-eyed maid in a most distractingly pretty summer gown.

She had pinned her straw hat to her gown, where it hung against the other hip, balancing the field glasses; her skirts were short, her free-limbed unconscious stride revealed small tan shoes and agreeable ankles.

Whether or not she was aware of his presence he could not determine, for she never appeared to look at him, which was sufficient to convince any cynical outsider like you or me.

At moments she paused, head on one side, eyes aloft, listening rapturously to the complicated song of the speckled tomtit. At moments she gazed pensively into the depths of

the Bronx—almost six inches deep in places—as though monsters lurked there in aqueous profundity. Several times she ran light-footed after the glittering dragon flies that sailed and drifted along the reedy reaches under the willows.

When she captured a specimen she applied chloroform to its nose, then sedately impaled it upon a pin.

And all the while Kelvin prowled, pretending not to see her; and all the while she appeared oblivious to him.

He muttered to himself: "I don't want to look at her, but I can't help it. Why doesn't she go somewhere else and chase dragon flies? . . . Besides, she's trespassing on my own collecting ground; I discovered this God-forsaken region first. I have first right to this place. Sooner or later we'll both stumble on something rare and valuable, and there'll be a dispute about it; there'll be trouble, sure——"

He broke off short; speech failed him; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. For there, fluttering lazily above the water, midway between him and the young girl on the opposite bank, appeared a butterfly.

It was not a particularly handsome butterfly; not apparently an insect to cause such instant and amazing symptoms of vital excitement in two young people; it was a moderate-sized, smoky-tinted specimen with a glimmer of deep blue playing over the sheen of the rapidly moving wings.

But as the two young people became simultaneously aware of the creature, two green gauze butterfly nets were whipped aloft, two symmetrical pairs of legs were instantly set in motion, two madly desirous hearts beat as one, two souls harbored the same traditional thought.

The butterfly, whose name happened to be *Argynnis Diana*, though she didn't suspect it, flew gayly along above the little river, upstream, and impartially midway between the two banks.

Along the east bank ran the girl, gracefully fleet, head turned, dark eyes following the insect, which darted on just out of reach of her net; on the west bank galloped Kelvin, his tin paraphernalia flopping and jingling, net in the air, terribly excited at his first sight of the great Southern Diana fritillary, whose presence in New York State had never before

been recorded even by a popular writer of fiction.

As for the big clouded Diana, flashing a hint of royal azure with every beat of her strong, fleet wings, she settled down to lead those two young, ardent souls a chase worthy of the goddess after whom she had been christened.

First she swung across to the east bank, where the girl instantly put on three speeds forward, chasing her with skirts a-flutter and flashing heels.

Diana turned; it was almost useless, but the girl attempted a mid-air net stroke and missed; and the butterfly whirled upward in alarm, flitting on slanting wings across to the west bank.

Kelvin fancied he heard a faint, broken-hearted exclamation, scarcely more than a quick indrawn breath, but he had no time for sentimental inquiry; Diana swept across his arc of vision; he leaped forward, net aloft, running warily, alert for the psychological second which might give him his opportunity.

And, as he ran, he was aware that across the water the girl was speeding over ferns and turf, keeping pace with him, a mix-

ture of determination and despair in her brown eyes, yet prepared for any accident which might give her another chance at the flying Diana.

So they ran; and it was evident that they both must have been in excellent physical condition, for the pace was fast and the sun was bright, and it was no boulevard they followed over the uneven country broken with clumps of bushes, fern, rocks, and fences.

As for the fences, the girl took them like a slim thoroughbred; over went her net first, then she went over; how, she never afterwards understood—but over she went, picked up her net, and on again with tan-shod feet flying.

Once Kelvin came a cropper; and as he fell his tin collecting boxes banged and dinned so that his fall resembled the fall of the White Knight; and the girl smothered a half-hysterical laugh and tried to keep her brown eyes on the butterfly.

But Kelvin was off again, and so near to the fleeing Diana that he made a net stroke, and missed.

Instantly the butterfly veered, dashed madly through the sunshine, up, up, over the top

of a maple tree, then swiftly descended once more to the east bank of the stream. And Kelvin groaned, but ran on.

Now his rival, the fleet-footed racer of the east bank, had caught her second breath. The sun glinted on her curly brown hair and in the depths of her dark eyes as she sprang forward, brandishing her net for the stroke that she had so long awaited. Nearer and nearer her flying feet brought her to Diana, who, low flying, was fluttering scarce ten paces forward.

Nearer and nearer drew the flushed pursuer; Kelvin set his teeth in despair as the green net swept level; then he could have yelled in his excitement, for Diana, avoiding the stroke, dipped sideways in mid-air, and whirled across the water in an ecstasy of fright, straightaway in front of him.

Now it meant a long, grim, dogged test of endurance before he could hope for another chance.

The butterfly was thoroughly alarmed, flying tirelessly forward across the country, and Kelvin settled down into a determined trot, confident at any rate that his neighbor across the stream had come to her last ditch.

But, after a moment or two, out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of fluttering skirts; and, astonished and slightly chagrined, he observed her askance, forging lightly ahead into his range of vision, pretty face flushed, hair undisciplined, the green net aloft and floating in the summer wind.

At first he was irritated; then her gallant and silent courage touched him, and he wanted to turn and call across the water to her and tell her that she'd probably be ill if she didn't stop. But he had no breath to do so; no time, no opportunity to turn. Diana was flying fast, and he had all he could do to keep her in view.

There was a little grove of trees just ahead where the river narrowed and made a sudden bend. If Diana got among the trees he'd probably lose sight of her; if Diana went over the treetops she'd cross to the east bank again, and that swift-limbed rival of his would probably get her this time.

Spurred into one last frantic dash, Kelvin shot forward and fairly ran the butterfly down; but Diana darted under his net, mounted straight up among the leaves, and

vanished. And, though Kelvin ran about distractedly hither and thither, he could not espy his Diana of the Bronx.

And after he had run round and round the outside of the clump of trees and had cantered up and down the open fields beyond, he stood still, gasping for breath until his breath came back into his lungs. Then, wild-eyed but alert, he strode into the clump of trees again. And here he became aware of his rival, flushed, breathless, charmingly disheveled, sitting upon a mossy stone, eyes persistently fixed on the top branches of a tall oak tree.

Her slender tanned wrists were bare, her sleeves pushed back to her elbows; and she sat, clasping her knees in her hands, chin up-tilted, delicate nose in the air, the green butterfly net across her lap.

Kelvin, breathing hard, looked up, too. He saw nothing but golden-green leaves and branches and the blue sky between. Then he looked at the girl, then up in the air, then at the girl, then up into the tree again.

Evidently the butterfly had alighted somewhere high in that oak tree, and she had seen

it and had taken the river at a single jump where it narrowed among the trees.

This was the limit. She had not only had the bad taste to chase his butterfly, but now she had come over into his territory to continue her flagrant conduct.

He said, speaking firmly and aloud: "I wonder where *my* butterfly went."

The intruder appeared not to notice him. She continued to clasp her knees in her hands and look up into the tree.

Kelvin looked up again, and continued looking until his neck ached. Then he glanced defiantly at the girl and sat down. Presently he forced a pleasant smile.

"I beg your pardon," he said cheerfully, and with a note of surprise in his voice, as though for the first time that day he had noticed her presence in Westchester. "I am wondering whether by any chance you observed a butterfly around this vicinity—belonging to me?"

She permitted him a slow, disdainful sweep of her eyes.

"I have seen several butterflies to-day," she said. "It did not occur to me they might belong to anybody."

"This one—the one I have been chasing—is a dusky bluish one," he ventured. "I really must secure that specimen; it's quite necessary for my rather important collection. So I wondered whether by any chance you happened to notice such a butterfly."

She remained silent.

He repeated his question.

"Yes, I saw it," she said, flushing up. "You know perfectly well that I saw it."

"Where is it now?" he asked, reddening in his turn.

"I do not see why I should answer that question," she said with perfect self-possession.

"Why—why, I've just explained to you. That is Diana's butterfly—a tremendously rare one. Never before has anybody seen it flying north of Virginia. And, of course, as I was fortunate enough to discover it—it's—so to speak—*my* butterfly."

"I think," she said resolutely, "that I was fortunate in seeing it before you—before anybody else noticed it. Under that impression," she added coldly, "I was at some pains and inconvenience to follow it."

"Pains!" he repeated; "inconvenience!

I may say that for myself. Of course, no doubt you supposed that you first discovered it——”

“I know I did.”

“I do not question the sincerity of your belief, but, as it happens, it was I who first discovered it——”

“I cannot admit that,” she retorted with a quaver in her voice.

“I’m sorry,” he said patiently, “but it’s a fact. And I would not press the point or insist if this butterfly were not so unusual——if the occurrence of this insect was not absolutely unique in this latitude.”

“I don’t see,” she said, with another little catch in her voice, “why that makes any difference.”

Kelvin spoke impressively:

“It makes this difference: if it were a common or even a rare specimen indigenous to Westchester, I, being a man, would naturally yield it to you. But this butterfly is too important to decorate the collection of a mere amateur; science knows no sex—or courtesy to sex. It is important to science and to the world that this specimen of *Argynnis Diana* should be procured and safely cared for by

some man who, like myself, is prepared to abandon the hideously commercial pursuits he has hitherto blindly indulged in, and devote the remainder of an all-too-brief career to the exacting demands of science."

When he had delivered himself of this, he paused to recover his breath and observe the effect on her.

She sat with head obstinately lowered, eyes bent on the moss at her feet; but she offered no answer, no concession.

"Will you tell me where that butterfly is?" he asked. "I don't desire to appear selfish."

"You *do* appear so."

"I don't mean to——"

"It—it will be a hideous disappointment to me if I lose that butterfly," she said. "I—I simply can't endure the thought of it. The idea of—of anybody taking it away from me!"

"In the interest of science," he began, but she shook her head.

"I can't help it; I like the color of that butterfly, and I want to place it in my collection. I"—she looked up hopefully—"I have a very pretty collection—all kinds and colors——"

"That's very praiseworthy," he explained; "but science is different. You merely want pretty things in cases to decorate a mantel or——"

"Of course I do!"

"Very well; then catch a lot of everyday butterflies. I—I'll help you if you wish."

"No, I don't wish it—thank you."

"As you please. Only you surely must recognize the importance of my securing this particular——"

"I do *not* recognize it."

There was a pause.

"Will you tell me where that butterfly is?"

No answer.

"Is it up in that oak tree?"

No reply.

He looked at her, but her pretty head was averted. Then an obstinate expression came over his features; he sat down on the dead leaves about ten feet away from her.

For a while he busied himself with arranging his specimens; first he unslung the bag of garter snakes, peeped into the neck of it, drew the string tight, and placed it on the grass.

Askance the girl watched the bag, shivering slightly when the limp folds undulated with the wriggling reptiles inside.

Then Kelvin spread out his ferns, wrapped up their roots in damp cloth, and squinted at the fronds through a pocket magnifying glass. After that he removed his hat, unpinned the butterflies, and placed the specimens, wings closed over their backs, in little three-cornered paper envelopes. These he packed carefully into a flat tin box which was slung over his shoulder.

He had a few grewsome caterpillars; these he counted and secured in another box punched full of holes. After that he emptied his pockets of the remaining treasures, placed each in its proper receptacle, and, duty finished, looked around inquiringly at his neighbor.

She appeared to be immersed in a study of the top branches of the oak; he strove to make out which particular leaf she was gazing at, having no doubt in his mind that Diana, wings folded, hung there clasping the leaf with delicate limbs.

It was like looking for a needle in a haystack, for, unless he had seen the butterfly

alight, it seemed utterly impossible to find it up there among a million leaves.

He studied the foliage until he grew peevish. Then, suddenly, he remembered that over his left shoulder he carried a game bag full of alluring luncheon. His entire physical being yearned for it. So first of all he went to the river, washed his hands, and returned.

Very methodically he produced a large, freshly ironed handkerchief and spread it out on the moss. Upon this he placed several species of nourishing sandwiches, some fruit, and a patent cooler full of spring water.

The girl resolutely watched the hidden Diana, yet, at moments, her brown eyes stole toward the single glass of water which he had poured.

"Now," he said coolly, "it being impossible for us both to eat together, I will take your place on watch while you lunch."

"Thank you," she said, "but I shall not tell you where my Diana is hiding."

"That is not necessary," he said. "If anything attempts to fly out of that oak tree I can see it. I'll simply keep my eye on the tree."

She declined with a shake of her head, but thanked him.

"Then I'll bring something to you——"

"Please don't!"

"I must—if I am to eat."

"I—I don't care for anything."

"But I can't sit there and stuff myself all alone."

She smiled faintly, glancing askance at the glass of water.

"You are a generous rival," she said. "I—I really am perishing for a sip of water."

He brought the glass to her.

"Have you plenty?" she inquired.

"Plenty."

She drank a little slowly, and while she was drinking he laid his game bag across her knees. On the flat leather was a clean sheet of note paper from his field book, and on this paper he placed some lettuce and chicken sandwiches, two pears, and three peaches.

She handed him the glass of water, demurring, but as he refused to touch food unless she did, she finally began, daintily.

"I had some luncheon—the packet slipped out of my collecting box when I was—was going over a fence," she explained.

"And you didn't stop to recover it?"

"Stop? For a thing like that?" she asked disdainfully.

"Well, that is rather plucky of you," he observed.

"I don't think so. I'd do almost anything—sacrifice anything—almost—to capture that butterfly."

He grew grave immediately; there was a silence; then he said:

"I didn't suppose you possessed any of the qualities one expects to find in a true scientist. I don't understand how an—an amateur, who cares only for the mere prettiness of a butterfly, could run as fast after one as you did, and keep up such a heartbreaking chase under a vertical sun——"

"It would break my heart if I couldn't get that butterfly," she said.

"It's the same with me," he admitted. "But I don't see why it would do anything so serious to you."

"Why not? I've set my heart on it."

"Have you a serious collection?"

"Yes," she said.

"Do you study butterflies?"

"Certainly I do."

"Seriously?"

"Perfectly," she smiled.

"Scientifically?" he persisted.

She pouted adorably: "No, if you mean to ask me whether I know all their names."

"But—what use are they to you?"

"They are of a use most important," she said with smiling decision. And as his eyes grew rounder she laughed. "Of course, you think that I probably cook and eat them."

"I can't understand," he said, "why you take such a tremendous lot of trouble to chase this butterfly——"

"I told you; it's the color that attracted me. I never saw such a delicately original combination of smoky gray and blue and pearl tints."

"And you want my rare and wonderful Diana just because you like the color of her wings?" he demanded impatiently.

"Just for that. In butterflies the combination of colors is so charmingly original that I use them in selecting my hats and gowns."

He looked at her exasperated. She was eating a peach, and the delicately delightful way she did it would have humbled any or-

dinary man to adoration. Even Kelvin, deep in his benighted soul of an entomologist, felt several exquisite thrills shooting among his ribs, and, between spasms of exasperation, he sat rather dazzled by her fresh, youthful beauty.

"There are some things which are the limit," he said, partly to himself.

The girl sipped her glass of water and gazed up into the tree.

"Suppose," he said, "that Diana should suddenly take a notion to come to earth?"

"I would run after her," she observed.

"So would I," he said promptly.

"Meanwhile," she nodded gayly, "there is no use in speculating as to which one of us is to be fortunate."

Clearly she had every confidence in her own quickness of eye and fleetness of limb, and her laughing courage disturbed Kelvin.

"In the interests of science," he said suddenly, "I ought to climb that tree."

"What?" she exclaimed, paling.

"I ought to sling my butterfly net around my neck and shin up that tree," he repeated.

"Tha—that is unfair—horridly unfair——"

"And shin up and up," he continued, un-

heeding, "until I get to the top. Then I'd easily discover Diana——"

"I—if you attempt to climb that tree," she exclaimed, "I'll climb it, too!"

"You can't," he jeered, feeling very, very mean in his triumph.

"I can. I'll do it, too—if you attempt it."

"I'm going to—in the interest of science," he announced deliberately. And, rising, he walked to the foot of the tree.

Instantly she sprang to her feet, but as he easily swung himself into the first crotch she halted, went white, then red, then, as he turned and looked down at her, the quick tears rushed to her eyes.

"Science or not," she faltered, in a choking voice, "it is—it is contemptible!"

But he was leaning down from the first branch, holding out both hands to her, and saying: "Of course, I mean to fight you on even terms. Catch my hands—reach up a little higher! Now! Swing clear! I'll lift you into the first crotch!"

It was done in an instant; he swung her from her feet to a firm footing beside him; and, as she caught a branch and steadied herself, she said:

"I knew you were not that sort. You fight fairly. I knew you always would."

"How did you know?"

"How? Why, I've made up my mind about you; I made up my mind the first time I ever saw you—this last spring—when you first came wandering along the Bronx."

"And—what did you decide?" he asked, affected by her frankness and by the nearness of her. For they were crowded rather closely together in the crotch of the oak—so close that he was sensible of the delicately vague fragrance of her—the faint, fresh odor of her hair, her gown, her breath.

She steadied her slender body, one hand on the tree trunk, and looked fearlessly aloft.

"Come on," she said. "Are you ready to start on even terms?"

He looked up at the high branches, then at her.

"*You* can't go up there," he said, with a curious sensation of apprehension.

"Why not?"

"I—it's too—too high. Your shoes are slippery——"

"There's no more chance of my falling than there is of yours, is there?"

And as he did not reply: "Fair warning!" she said, catching with both sun-tanned hands the branch above her head. "Fair warning! One, two, three!" and they scrambled upward together through the thicket of leaves and branches.

They had shortened their butterfly nets, and hung them around their necks by rubber bands. The rings and the netting became constantly entangled in the foliage as they raced upward, climbing swiftly toward the patches of blue sky on high.

He easily outstripped her; her skirts and her net seemed to catch continually. Besides, her wrists were not as strong as his, and her limbs were not so long or so sturdy. He used his powerful shoulder muscles and swung up the ladder of branches past her, tearing a skyward path through the green. Already he had distanced her; the precarious footing did not slacken his pace, nor hers either; but his head was above hers, then slowly neck, chest, shoulders ahead of hers. He glanced down into her determined face, caught a glimmer of defiance in the brown eyes; then suddenly the eyes widened under a shock of purest fear; he saw the small,

smooth hand slip, clutch at the branch, cling and slip; the face below him turned ashy. And at the same moment he stooped and caught her under her arms.

For a second she hung there at a dizzy height—a dead weight in his arms, head fallen back. He thought she had fainted, but the brown eyes opened, she swung her right leg forward and regained the crotch from whence it had slipped.

“Quick! Around my neck with both arms!” he gasped. “I can hold you!”

“W-will I endanger you?”

“No, no! Hurry!”

Her clasp around his neck nearly tore him from the branches, but he hung close, bending slowly backward, farther, farther, until she was drawn little by little out of the abyss and fell forward safe against him among the branches.

Minute after minute throbbed; again and again she strove to recover her self-possession, but she only crouched there, trembling, eyes closed.

“You play fairly,” she managed to gasp. “Are you waiting to give me another chance?”

"You mean that you are willing to try it—*again?*" he demanded incredulously.

She nodded, breathing fast. "One moment—to recover my confidence—if you don't mind."

"You plucky little thing!" his lips motioned, but he made no sound, watching the play of golden light and leaf shadow over her closed eyes and creamy skin. Then a slight color came back into the cheeks, her brown eyes opened on his; she tried to smile.

"I am ready, I think," she said.

A slowly growing thrill enveloped him; he made no answer, but his eyes never left hers.

"Are you ready?" she asked, clearing her forehead of its hair with unsteady hand. Her hand still trembled a little as she grasped the next branch above her head. And as though in simple curiosity he laid his hand over it. Her fingers were icy.

"You are afraid," he said.

"I know it."

"But you are still willing to try again?"

"Of course."

His hand over hers began to shake slightly, and she noticed it and raised her eyes.

"Are *you* afraid?"

"Horribly."

"Then I'll wait for you," she said simply, leaning forward to steady her body against the main trunk.

"You'll have to wait a long time," he said.

"I don't mind."

"Longer than you know."

"You waited for me. I don't mind."

"But—but it is *you* I am afraid for, not myself."

She looked up with the pure, direct gaze of a child. For a minute they faced each other in silence.

"May I tell you something?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then—there's a man—a friend of mine—No, I can't explain it that way. Let me begin in another way. Did—have you—noticed any particular change in yourself—any radical change in your temperament and character—a—recently? I mean within the last three months? For instance, were you, three months ago, particularly devoted to prowling about the Bronx and listening to dickey birds and chasing butterflies?"

She shook her pretty head. "I am greatly changed," she said. "Three months ago

nothing on earth could have induced me to run wild like this—shatter every canon of convention and common sense and go roaming about, gypsy-mad. Were *you* always so devoted to natural history?"

"I? No!" he said, almost violently. "I was *not*! I'm normally a plain business man. I make pulp paper! Three months ago I began this sort of performance——"

"Three months!"

"Exactly—like yourself. I didn't want to do it. I, for example—I detest snakes and caterpillars, but I've a box full of 'em down there."

She shuddered.

"And here I am," he said, "up a tree like an accursed monkey, disputing over a butterfly with a girl I—I never saw——"

"Did—*didn't* you see me—in the beginning?"

"Yes, I did, and I couldn't keep my eyes off you. And that is the truth!"

"Oh," she said faintly.

"Yes, the truth!" he continued excitedly; "and the truth is that, somehow, within three months I've the most dreadful and shameless inclination to tell the absolute truth to any-

body who asks me. It's—it's damaging my business somewhat; it's raising the mischief with me socially. I'm a changed, transformed, translated man; I'm not myself. The chances are that I'll never, never again be myself—after what Manners has done to me——”

“*Manners!*”

“Oh, he's evidently been meddling with you, too, said Kelvin. “You are probably one of the agreeable girls he noticed from his club window. Tell me—*were* you the usual frivolous, capricious, fashionable, empty-headed opportunist, brought up in terror of convention and good taste? *Were* you?”

“Y-yes,” she faltered. “I—I hadn't an idea outside of the drilled routine I was bred to. They think I am crazy at home.”

“Then it's Manners!” he exclaimed.

“Manners?” she faltered. “I don't think I understand.”

“Manners is a man—William T. Manners!—a mischief-making, meddlesome friend of mine! He's given you absent treatment——”

“For what?” she demanded angrily.

“Frivolity—mental vacancy—general use-

lessness, I suppose! He gave it to me—he's filled me full of thoughts! He's fired me with a craze for truth and Nature."

"I—I am afflicted that way, too," she murmured. "I am most unwilling to say so, but the truth is that w-when I first saw you, you attracted me—v-very m-m-much."

"You plucky little thing to say so!" he cried warmly.

"No; it isn't pluck. I—can't help it. Do you think I want to admit such a thing to a man whose name I don't even know?" she demanded. "It isn't pluck; for instance, I didn't want to chase that butterfly and climb this tree! Can't you understand? Please, please understand that I know how horrid and common and unconventional I appear."

"I absolutely deny it. You know I couldn't help saying so if you did appear that way. But you don't; you are charming and bewilderingly attractive——"

"Oh, please—I don't wish you to say"—she stopped—"I mean—that the truth is—the dreadful, unescapable truth is that I do wish to listen to you—even up this tree."

Her rising color and her emotion were reflected in his face and voice.

"You are the—the most splendid girl I ever saw," he said unsteadily.

"You—you—oh, *must* I tell you how frightened and happy you make me!" she asked in crimson distress. "I have—I was engaged to marry a man—but he isn't like you—oh, not at all like you. I think—if you—if I thought you might really ever care for me—*that* way—that I'd break the engagement."

Her hand under his trembled; he imprisoned the slim fingers.

"I *do* care for you," he said unsteadily; "I—I am quite mad about you. Can't you see it—can't you feel it?"

"Y-yes. C-can *you* see how—how perfectly crazy I am about you? I am so—so dazed that I think we had better climb down out of this tree."

"Not until I give you—yield to you—the dearest and most precious object that I ever hope to possess!" he cried.

And, before she understood what he contemplated, he was madly scrambling upward, among the branches.

And now, fearlessly swinging among the topmost branches, she saw him extend his net, lean far over the tangled maze of green, and beat the foliage.

Instantly there came a bluish flash of wings, a swish of the net, a fluttering struggle within the gauze prison, a faint taint of chloroform in the summer air.

And a minute later he came climbing down, radiant, triumphant, and laid in her trembling palm the conquered Diana, lovely in pearl and cloudy blue.

"For *me*!" she asked.

"For you. I wish I had a thousand to give you."

"I—I can't—I simply cannot take it."

"Do you wish to make me miserable?"

The brown eyes were raised to his—clear, steadfast, pure eyes that did not falter.

"I would rather make you happy than anybody in all the world," she said slowly.

His senses were swimming as he laid the butterfly away in a box, put the box into his pocket, and turned to her.

"I am ready to have you help me down," she said.

And, heart racing madly, he managed to

aid her in the descent, down, slowly, from branch to branch, guiding her with arm and hand within his hand.

And at last they reached the last crotch, and he bent down and swung her free above the moss.

"Shall I let you go?" he asked, looking down into her face.

"Yes; it is not far. I can easily drop this distance."

"But—I don't want to let go of you."

"Why?" She looked up, then the color flooded her face. For a moment they were silent, she swinging from his arms above the moss, he bent above her.

"Brown eyes, brown eyes," he whispered; "shall I let you go?"

"Gray eyes," she murmured; "gray eyes! Shall I let *you* go?"

"I love you," he pleaded under his breath.

Hanging there she raised her hands and rested them on his arms that held her suspended an instant, looking up at him. Then, her soul in her eyes, she threw her head back; and their lips clung.

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"One thing," she sighed, as they moved slowly together through the primrose dusk, "and I must do it at once."

"What?" he murmured rapturously.

"Write to that very unfortunate *ci-devant* fiancé of mine and explain."

Kelvin forced a sigh for the sake of decency.

"Poor devil!" he said. "I'm not really sorry for him, of course. Who is he?"

"His name is William Manners," she said softly. "And if he didn't know any better than to mistake the girl he was engaged to for somebody he'd never seen, that is not *my* fault; is it, beloved?"



CHAPTER III

AN OVERDOSE



WHEN, at length, William Manners realized that he was actually able, through the sheer force of mental persuasion, to control and influence anybody and everybody, whether or not he knew them personally, whether or not they were aware of what he was up to; and when he understood that his idle experiments in mental science had really resulted in changing not only the character, but even the physical appearance, of those on whom he had ventured to

operate, his amazement, remorse, and alarm knew no bounds.

He had chosen five very imperfect men of his acquaintance on whom to attempt these practices, and he had also selected, as marriageable possibilities for his friends, five women with whom he was *not* acquainted—the first five ornamental young girls he chanced to observe on Fifth Avenue, passing the club window where he sat—all utter strangers to him, as he believed. For, his monocle being in his eye, he had not recognized in one of these ladies his own *fiancée*.

Of the five men on whom he had exercised his uncanny will power all were now exhibiting symptoms logically consequent upon the mental treatment he had given them; Kelvin had left him that morning, hopping mad and also Nature mad; and for weeks now he had had Dudley Todd on his hands—not the old, familiar, impossible Todd, not the tolerated but despised Todd, the club affliction and general nincompoop in ordinary—but a brand-new Todd, a popular Todd, a radically translated Todd.

And all might have been well had Todd merely developed along the lines of the

wholesome mental treatment which Manners had honestly meant to give him ; but Manners was far from judicious in his treatment. He considered Todd such a desperate case that his mental treatment was a sort of urgency treatment—as strenuous as first aid to the mortally injured, and far more vigorous than he realized at the time. And now, when too late, utterly unable to reverse treatment or modify what he had done, he perceived with horror that he had given Todd an overdose.

And Todd was fast becoming the limit in Manhattan town.

In an agony of contrition Manners had gone to Todd and confessed what he had done to him, supposing that Todd would take a grip on himself and stop, even if he incidentally destroyed Manners as an act of abstract justice.

But Todd, when he recovered from his astonishment, seemed rather pleased than annoyed, and admitted frankly that the absent treatment given him by Manners had agreed with him.

In vain Manners expostulated. Todd obstinately insisted that it agreed with him and made him very, very happy ; that he felt him-

self endowed with the energy, imagination, and capacity for romantic affection of a dozen men all rolled into one.

But Todd's conduct had now become such that Manners, feeling personally responsible for the young fellow's amazing behavior, felt obliged to follow him about day and night.

And the antics of Todd, and his sleepless, untiring assiduity in the headlong hunt for happiness, were wearing Manners to a shadow in the effort to do police duty.

Then another blow fell. Eric Kelvin returned from the Bronx and informed Manners that he was now engaged to marry Manners's *fiancée*, and Manners rushed madly uptown to expostulate with the object of his adoration.

But that charming and changed young devotee to Nature merely admitted that she no longer cared for him, but loved Kelvin with all her heart; and Manners rushed home again, a prey to sentimental agitation.

The Lenox Club was his home. He locked himself in his bedroom, where for twenty-four hours he maintained a distracted silence, interrupted at intervals by processions of waiters bearing ice, vichy, tonic, and kindly

inquiring notes from Kelvin, to which he deigned no reply.

By and by, Kelvin himself arrived, but Manners refused to open the door. Only his voice, hoarse and injured, satisfied Kelvin that his friend still lived.

"Don't do anything terrible, will you?" insisted Kelvin.

"I may," said Manners ominously, beginning to enjoy himself.

So Kelvin, disconcerted, sat down outside the door. And, by and by, Manners, being low in his mind, sought consolation in a mouth organ.

"Oh, pip!" muttered Kelvin, jumping up and rapping on the door. "Come out, William! You are convalescent!"

Manners wanted to, but he only blew a sullen blast on his mouth organ.

"Are you coming out?" repeated the other. "There are five men waiting for us in the card room."

So Manners came out, scowling, and they shook hands.

"I never, never thought you'd do such a thing," said Manners, sulkily lighting the cigar that Kelvin offered.

"She never did like you very much, anyway," explained Kelvin. "Come on downstairs; Todd is banking——"

"Todd!" groaned Manners. "I—I'm sick of the very name of Todd!" And, in a last spasm of revolt: "If ever I am ass enough to fool with mental science again I deserve to marry a Sixth Avenue manicure! Eric, would it inconvenience you to come in every morning for a month and disable me with a kick?"

"William," said Kelvin suspiciously, "is Todd one of your victims? I've wondered what was the matter with him. *Is he?*"

But Manners, with a tragic gesture, pushed open the door of the card room, and the two men were politely greeted and invited to "sit in."

The *seance* was a gay one, seven celebrants assisting at the ceremonies; and the gayest of the gay, the cheeriest, the liveliest, was Todd, bubbling over with the infernal and inexhaustible energy of a dozen men.

"Can nothing tire that creature?" muttered Manners to himself, between his teeth. "He's tuning up for another horrible evening. He'll be all over the country, and he'll

get into the newspapers if I don't follow him."

Todd, unconscious, trolled a merry ditty and drew two more kings.

"Are you tired, old chap?" asked Manners. "You look like the last run of jelly-fish, dear friend."

"Who? I? Why, I'm fresh as a daisy," said Todd, betting the limit.

Manners reviewed his hand with a bitter smile and stayed out.

"He does look queer, though," he insisted, with a significant nod to Kelvin. "And I don't believe he's perfectly well. Todd," he added anxiously, "do you feel perfectly well, old fellow?"

"Certainly," said Todd, with a smirk, as he gathered up the chips, and shuffled the cards for the kitty sweepstakes. "Is every student in?" — glancing around the table. "Come, get nimble, Kelvin; you're shy a blue one!" And, nodding similar admonition across at Kelly Jones, he lighted a cigar and dealt cold decks all round.

Kelvin spread his cards face up on the table, observed with disgust the single sou-brette, and, unable to draw to a kitty clean-

up, admitted he was out. Then he leaned over toward Manners.

"Is Todd one of your victims?" he whispered. "You've certainly made a man of him!"

"The trouble is," said Manners, "I've made about a dozen men of him. Look at him now! He's hatching deviltry! Isn't he the saucy Clarence? Look at him with his pat hand! When I treated him by mental suggestion I must have given him a terrific overdose of everything——"

He broke off short as Todd triumphantly spread out his five cards.

"All pink! friends, students, and relatives," be observed. "It's only seven o'clock. Shall we continue our votive offerings to the astigmatic goddess?"

But sentiment was against him. Several men said they were hungry, and everybody began to make precise little piles of their multicolored chips. Todd, courteous and indefatigable, immediately became very busy with his pencil and paper, checking off the returns. Manners had no chips to pile up symmetrically, and he rose and walked to the window. Kelvin joined him, and peered out

and upward where the last tints of daylight were fading from the summer sky and the first stars faintly sparkled.

"Stars out already," observed Manners gloomily. "I'm dog tired. I'd like to spend a quiet evening—dine here alone, read the paper, and go to bed. But I can't do it."

"On account of Todd?" inquired Kelvin.

"Yes, on account of that infernal Todd! He's killing me, that's what he's doing—dragging me about all day and all night with him."

"And you dare not let him out of your sight?" asked Kelvin sympathetically.

"I should think not! That man has a capacity for putting both feet in it beyond all dreams of common sense. You remember what a little nincompoop he was—a lazy, idle, dull-minded, unimaginative, commonplace peddler of stocks and bonds?"

"Well, I thought he needed mental suggestion, and I was ass enough to treat him for everything he lacked! And look at him!—*Look* at him, Kelvin!—Clever, industrious, full of poetic fire, imaginative, romantic, and yet capable enough to make a fortune for himself in Wall Street in three months!

“Look at him, I tell you! Why, he’s positively grown tall and good-looking!—and—and I wish I hadn’t treated him for lack of imagination and idleness; I do, indeed! He’s full of enterprise and full of a tireless energy that’s simply killing me, Kelvin. I’m nearly dead, trying to keep him out of mischief. Why on earth can’t he get tired? He works like a millionaire all day, and he’s all over everywhere after five o’clock! I must have been crazy to inject that combination of moonstruck romance and devilish energy into him. Hark! Just listen to him now!”

The two men turned from the window toward the lighted green table, where half a dozen men had gathered around Todd as he closed their accounts.

And Todd was saying enthusiastically: “Well, we had a corking game, didn’t we? There’s a lot of pure romance in the old-fashioned national game. There’s romance everywhere and in everything. This city reeks with romance—every street is full of it, day and night, if only you realize it. Isn’t it, Manners? Why, I tell you, fellows, that a mere walk in town is to me one endless tension of excitement and suspense——”

Billy West laughed, and asked if Todd really found a walk on Fifth Avenue particularly exciting.

"Certainly I do!" said Todd; "on Fifth Avenue or on any street or lane or alley or mews in this wonderful metropolis!"

Kelly Jones observed that he, personally, never had encountered any inexpensive romance in the neighborhood.

"Nonsense!" said Todd; "town's full of it! I never put on my hat and coat and take my gloves and my stick but I experience a subtle thrill of most delicious suspense. I say to myself: 'I am going out among several millions of unknown fellow-creatures. I am likely at any moment to meet with almost any kind of an adventure. I may encounter Fate itself around the first corner, or Destiny hiding behind a tree.' Who knows? I don't; you don't! And *that* is the best part of it!"

And Todd smiled so winningly upon those about him that they all smiled in return. He had become very popular within a few weeks.

Said Todd: "When I set foot out of doors my pulses leap; I'm all afire with energy, all aquiver with the possibilities before me.

Every street is a vague vista of haunted mystery and promise; every lamp-post exquisitely significant; every electric light seems to wink at me and beckon me on to perilous adventure! Chance lies before me; all around me Hazard dogs my step; and a most exhilarating mixture of foreboding, apprehension, expectancy, and hope sets me trotting out into the metropolitan wilds——”

“And me, too!” muttered Manners to Billy West.

“Too bad,” said West sympathetically—the first expression of anything resembling sympathy Manners had heard for several days. He liked West; he was inclined to like West for several reasons. One was that, far away in the back part of his head, he entertained an excessive admiration for one of Billy West’s sisters—not the pretty one. His admiration was not based on a personal knowledge of her, for, as far as he knew, he had never seen her. But Billy talked of her a great deal, and, from her brother’s enthusiastic description, Manners had formed a curious attachment for the girl, which now, in his condition of bereavement, haunted him with shy but tender persistence. And some day

he felt that he was destined to hear more about Billy West's sister—*not* the pretty one.

Meanwhile Todd, the unspeakable, was still holding forth.

Several men asked: "Well, Toddy, do you ever really make good? Do you ever seize romance by the coat tails? *Do* you actually have any genuine adventures? Does he, Manners?"

"Plenty," observed Manners morosely. "Ask any desk sergeant in the five boroughs!"

"Of course I do," added Todd joyously. "Only Manners, there, has a strange delusion that I'm always going to get into some sort of scrape; but I never do—not serious scrapes," he added, linking his arm in Manners's arm as the men began to file out. "I say, Kelvin, Manners and I are going out in quest of adventures. Will you come?"

But Kelvin's evenings were now all taken; Manners looked at him sideways, and understood.

So Kelvin blushed becomingly and excused himself, and Manners looked after him wistfully. He had not yet recovered from the shock of Kelvin's engagement announcement,

and sometimes his bereavement made him wistful and sometimes it merely made him mad.

"Where shall we go to-night?" asked Todd restlessly. "We'll probably have some most diverting adventure wherever we go and whatever we do."

"Why," fumed Manners, "can't you stay in the club to-night and read the paper and go to bed?"

"Go to bed!" echoed Todd. "That's the excitement of it. Nobody on earth can tell what bed I'll sleep in next—if I sleep in any!"

Manners pleaded: "Can't you give me a rest for one evening——"

"What? Miss the possibilities of a whole evening?"

"But I'm tired——"

"You don't have to go," said Todd.

"Yes, I do! I feel responsible for you."

"Why? Just because you gave me absent treatment for which I'm eternally obliged?"

"I— Can't you understand that I overdid it?"

"Not for my taste," said Todd serenely.

"Come on; get the valet to pack your grip,

and we'll go down to Oyster Bay, where all those jolly girls are——"

"Not into good society with you!" snapped Manners. "I've had enough of that for a while."

"Why?"

"Because, when you go into decent society, you begin paying serious attentions to every pretty girl you meet. What do you think you are—a syndicate? Do you mean to be bigamous? Don't you know you overdo it? And I have to go around afterwards and explain that you are queer——"

"Well, you've got to stop that!" cried Todd hotly.

"Stop it? Why, man, if I don't appear regularly and faithfully in the wake of the ruin you have wrought, do you know where *you'd* be?"

"I'd be engaged if you once let me carry matters to a finish——"

"Yes, engaged—every evening from eight to half past eleven. You don't realize how you compromise yourself whenever you talk to a pretty girl. You make every one of 'em think you're in love with them——"

"I am!"

Manners glared, then fumbled for his eyeglass.

"Todd!" he said with deep emotion, "it's my fault. I overdosed you. You can't help it. You think you're a multiple personality. You don't comprehend how plural you behave; you don't realize how you overdo it, how collectively you make love, what an ass you really are! You don't understand that you are now practically on the verge of being engaged to marry eleven separate girls——"

"Yes, I do! And I want to!"

"Marry 'em all?"

"No; be engaged to them. Why don't you let me? Why do you go round after I've made a batch of serious proposals and tell them that I don't mean it—that there's something hideous the matter with me? If you'd mind your own business and let me select one of them, I'd be at rest, and so would you."

"Idiot!" retorted Manners; "that isn't the way to get married! You can't go about obtaining options that way. Great Heavens, Todd, what have I done to you? What an awful overdose I've given you! I deserve this sickening penance—a life eternally spent

in following you around to keep you out of the penitentiary——”

He almost broke down. Todd laid a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“Well, we won’t go to Oyster Bay, then,” he said. “Don’t worry, Manners. We’ll take things easy to-night if you’re tired. We’ll just take a little stroll together.”

“Every time I stroll with you,” said Manners, “something unexpected happens. You’re right, Todd; you do have adventures. Nobody else does in New York, but *you* do; they come flocking after you the moment you set foot out of doors. And I get the butt-end of ’em, usually.”

“Isn’t it fortunate,” said Todd rapturously, “that I, who, by your method of treatment, am so thoroughly equipped for adventures, have ’em in such agreeable profusion? I know perfectly well that after dinner this evening when you and I stroll out—no matter where I go or which way I turn—somewhere in the mysterious medley of light and shadow I am certain to encounter something or somebody most extraordinary.”

Manners groaned.

“Perhaps,” murmured Todd, gazing heav-

enward with rapt eyes—"Perhaps I may even this very night catch a glimpse of her whom I am destined to make happy some immortal day!"

"Oh, piffle!" said Manners.

"You don't understand," sighed Todd dreamily. "The celestially perfect and still invisible. She may be encountered anywhere! But I shall know her when I see her——"

"That," said Manners, "is why you require a police escort. Are you dining with me? Very well, then. I'm going to dress."

"So am I," murmured Todd. "I—I feel curiously and prophetically and strangely like a—a bridegroom this evening——"

"You usually feel like several," snapped Manners.



CHAPTER IV

A REMEDY



ABOUT eleven o'clock that evening Manners seized Todd by the elbow and shook him fiercely.

"Are you *ever* going to stop walking?" he demanded.

"Why, it's only eleven o'clock," protested Todd. "I don't believe we've walked fifteen miles yet."

"We've covered fifty! Look at me!" insisted Manners, mopping the rivulets of perspiration from his face and attempting to

adjust his wilted collar. "Everything I've got on is sticking to me like plaster; my shoes hurt; I'm thirsty—" He choked, exasperated.

"I, personally," observed Todd, "feel agreeably cool and fresh and comfortable, so I think I'll stroll on a bit farther. But," he added, "you need not feel obliged to accompany me."

Manners glared at him, then around at the dimly illuminated and unfamiliar surroundings.

"Where are we?" he growled. "We might as well be in a foreign city. What street is this?"—peering up at a lamp-post. "Eighty-sixth Street! East! Who on earth ever heard of East Eighty-sixth Street? What's that cross street? East Side Avenue! Never heard of it! I don't want to hear of it! I am— *What's* that over there?"

"A park," said Todd, in pleased surprise. "What a charmingly strange little park! And what's that beyond?—the East River? Isn't it fascinating, William? And look at those quaint old-time houses! What a funny little *cul-de-sac* of a court they form! Why, William, this is perfectly delightful to emerge

from the reek of things into this unknown oasis on the river's midnight edge—the night's Plutonian shore, so to speak.”

“Come home!” said Manners coldly.

“Home? And leave this place without having had a single extraordinary adventure!” He gazed rather blankly at Manners. “Do you know, William, that this is the first time in months I have failed to encounter some sort of an adventure before I turned my nose homeward? And this is just the place for almost anything to jump out at you.”

Manners said he objected to being jumped out at.

“And it's curious, too,” mused Todd, looking hopefully about, “because when I started I had the most intense sort of a premonition that something most unusual was going to happen to me. Why do you suppose nothing has stung me?”

Manners, too vexed to reply, fanned his heated features with his hat.

“In fact,” continued Todd, unheeding him, “I felt like a bridegroom—like a whole procession of bridegrooms—when I started out. Let's go over into that curious little park and

sit on a bench. Perhaps something will break loose within ten minutes."

Manners said that he had no objection to resting for a moment, and they entered the park, mounted some stone steps to the left, and ascended the dim, winding path under the trees.

As they came out on a sort of terrace the fresh river breeze struck them, and they looked out into a world of darkness. East and south myriads of lights twinkled; the vast bulk of the newest bridge towered against the stars; and, both to the north and south, the lights of huge municipal institutions glimmered, cities in themselves, so wide was the territory they covered on the shadowy islands.

North lay the masses of Harlem, lighted against the horizon, far as the eye could see. West, avenue on avenue cross-striped by countless streets, lay the metropolitan wastes.

Along the river wall below, the poor of Yorkville sat huddled, seeking a breath of air ere they crept inland to their kennels—vague masses of humanity, darkening the masonry as heaps of seaweed edge the tide mark.

For a while the two men sat listening to

the foggy-throated river horns, watching the ferryboats pass like floating cages of fire, or some big schooner, all sails set, yet scarcely drawing, swinging swiftly southward on the ebb.

Suddenly Todd rose from his seat and, turning his back to the river, looked eagerly inland.

"What's the matter?" asked Manners morosely. "Can't you remain motionless for half a second? Are you a combination of grasshopper and centipede, or are you a man?"

Todd fairly danced with eagerness and impatience.

"No, by St. Vitus, you can't sit still," said Manners. "What makes you do that two-step? What are you staring at, Todd? I won't stay here if anything's going to happen!"

"I am only excited by an idea," explained Todd. "That curious row of old red-brick houses seems to be such a good stage setting for an adventure. Look, William, in all that strange, quaint, wabby row of bricks there is only one window lighted. Isn't that mysterious?"

"Wonderful," said Manners scornfully. "It reminds me of a plot of Paul de Kock —*not!*"

"Well, that single lighted window may not seem so very mysterious to you or to anybody else, but *I* consider it strangely, ominously significant, William. I believe there's an adventure about to happen to me!" he added so earnestly and with such naïve conviction that Manners turned sharply around:

"Why?" he demanded uneasily.

"Because that romantic feeling begins to permeate me. I feel bright and confident and gay, and I am inclined to song."

"Well, I'm not. Come on; it's the homeward trek for ours." And he arose and grasped Todd firmly by the elbow, urging him toward the street.

"Curious," murmured Todd — "Curious that nothing happens. I can't understand it, William. This is not my usual luck——"

And he continued expostulating alternately with Fate and with Manners as the latter dragged him most unwillingly from the park and into the dim street where the quaint old row of red-brick houses stood ranged in the darkness, all their owlsh-eyed windows

closed and sealed save one. But from that single window a light streamed out across the street.

Todd halted before the house. Manners attempted to drag him onward, but he resisted.

"All right!" snapped Manners; "then stay here!" And he dropped Todd's arm and walked haughtily toward the corner, but without the slightest intention of really abandoning his friend.

When he got as far as the corner, without hearing any sound of repentant feet behind him, he swung around, mad all through, and shouted: "Todd!"

Echo answered: "Todd!"

There was not a soul in the street. Todd had evaporated.

First of all Manners, in an alarming temper, strode back to the house in front of which he had left Todd standing. He went into the area, but there was nobody there; he ascended the front steps and tried the door. It was locked.

Followed then the obvious theory that Todd had run away from him. Where do men run when they run guiltily away? Logic

answered that they run around blocks; so Manners ran around the block in the opposite direction, then into the park. Then, worried, panting and furious, he sat down on a bench and fanned his streaming features with his hat.

And all the while Todd was not a dozen yards away from him, standing inside the door of the red-brick house with the single lighted window.

For Todd, when he had lingered to gaze at the house, noticed that the front door stood just ajar; and instantly he accepted the accident as a belated promise of adventure long overdue.

So no sooner did Manners walk off in a huff on pretense of abandoning him than he seized the opportunity and darted up the steps burning with optimism and curiosity.

"Somebody left the front door ajar; robbers may have slipped in," he argued with himself, taking a firmer grip on his slim malacca walking stick as he pushed open the door and peeped hopefully into the dark hallway.

Then his name shouted angrily afar by Manners startled him, and, stepping inside the hallway, he softly closed the door. At

the same instant, from somewhere above, he heard a woman's voice raised in tremulous pleading—a sweet, thrilling voice, pitifully unsteady, yet every word exquisitely distinct; and Todd, frozen to attention, listened, his heart in his mouth.

“O Harry! Harry! Don't drive me into the street!” were the first sad words he heard. “You swore to right the wrong you did me! How—how can you abandon me, Harry? How c-can you fling me aside to die under the world's cold scorn?”

Todd, in the darkness, turned a fiery red and set his teeth in his lower lip.

“W-what am I to do?” pleaded the beautiful voice. “Where can I turn?—where can I creep to bury my shame? D-don't cast me away—don't laugh at me so cruelly—Harry! Harry! Don't strike me!—Help! Murder——”

Todd's hair rose straight on end; then with a shout he galloped up the stairs, swung around the banisters, flew up the second flight, and halted, speechless, confronted by a tall young girl who stood on the landing, the light from an open door behind throwing her young figure into motionless silhouette.

"W-what are you doing here?" she faltered.

"D-doing?" he repeated breathlessly. "There's somebody being murdered in this house!"

"What!"

"Didn't you hear?" he demanded, staggered by her frank astonishment. "I tell you that some scoundrel named Harry is threatening a woman with violence——"

"H-Harry?" she stammered, staring at him incredulously. "What do you mean? I am the only person in this house."

Then she took two unsteady steps back into her gas-lit room; he saw her face turning from a startled pallor to a violet rosy tint; she caught at the mantel for support, swayed, took one last look at Todd, and, with a gesture of abandon, covered her pretty face with both hands. He thought she was weeping.

And for a long while Todd looked at her, bewildered, because her voice was certainly the voice he had heard in heartbreaking appeal to Heaven.

Was she attempting to shield that unspeakable Harry?

Todd inserted his head in the doorway, glared about the gas-lit room, stepped in, and craned his neck to see whether the ruffian might be cowering in the alcove.

But he saw only a desk there, and piles of typewritten manuscript covering it. And on the blue covers of the manuscript he noticed the words: "Act First."

The faintest glimmering of the actual situation dawned on him. He still clutched his stick fiercely; the light of battle still lingered in his eyes; but his stride had become a walk, he sidled toward the door, glanced uncertainly about, hesitated; then gradually a partial solution of the matter overwhelmed him, leaving him hot with embarrassment.

She dropped her hands into her lap and looked at him, and he looked foolishly at her; then again her hands flew to her face, covering it, and she bent forward, resting her elbows on her knees. But Todd understood that the tears that turned her blue eyes starry were not tears of grief.

Todd stood very still. His ears seemed to him to have grown unusually red and hot and big.

Once again she uncovered her face to look

at him; once again she wildly veiled it behind ten pretty fingers. And at last Todd produced upon his features a spasm intended for a smile.

It was not a very genuine attempt, but it seemed to be sufficient to reinfect her. That made Todd smile again, and the result was less forced this time.

"So it was only part of act first, all that line of talk about Harry?" he began bravely.

"O-oh, yes—only p-p-part of act f-first," she managed to reply. "I'm awfully sorry."

He looked at her, scarcely yet convinced: "Then there isn't any Harry? There isn't anybody going to be abandoned——"

"N-no; nobody is going to abandon anybody."

"Exactly. Ah—it—ah—sounded distressingly real."

"Did it? I'm awfully sorry."

"I never heard such p-pathos in a human voice," insisted Todd. "I wish to Heaven that there had been a Harry somewhere about."

She dropped her hands and gazed at him from the loveliest and brightest blue eyes he had ever encountered.

"How," she asked curiously, "did you get into my house?"

"Who?—Me?" he faltered, neglecting grammar to gain time.

"Certainly, you. *How* do you come to be here in this house? And *why*?"

"The front door was ajar; that's *how*. I thought thieves might have taken occasion to sneak in; that's *why*."

"O bother," she said; "I never can get used to locking up my own house. I don't seem to be able to remember all those details—having been accustomed to servants. Was it actually open?"

"It was."

"And so you thought you'd see whether any robbers had crept in to murder me? And you came fearlessly to investigate?"

"Yes," said Todd, modestly admitting his valor; "and I should like to have had a chance at that fellow—Harry."

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "That was very civil of you to come upstairs when you heard *Mary Meeker* pleading with *Henry St. Aubyn* for her life."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Todd, turning red.

They looked at one another, struggling against the inevitable; then they both broke into laughter uncontrollable.

"Did I—was it really so convincingly done?" she tried to say.

"Perfectly! I wanted to k-kill that man. I—I want to harm him yet."

"Oh, I am so glad! It is the most splendid test! *Do* you think somebody will take the play and produce it? And do you think it will be a success? And do you think that some great emotional actress would create the part? *Do* you?"

"*You* could create the part," he said almost resentfully.

"I? Why, I am not an actress. I am only——"

She stopped, raising her eyes to him very gravely. "I think, first of all," she said, "that you had better tell me who you are. Not that I am the slightest bit afraid or suspicious; I am not afraid of anything, and have not been for three months. So, if you please, who are *you*?"

"I—I'm only Dudley Todd," he admitted.

"Dudley Todd? Oh; my brother knows you at the Lenox Club. I am Evelyn West."

"B-B-Billy West's s-s-sister!" he stammered.

"Yes; not the pretty one; the eccentric one who has taken up Settlement work and 'isms,' and is good to the poor and has missions, and who has just bought this quaint old house here overlooking East River Park——"

"You! Billy West's——"

"Yes; *not* the pretty one. And I live here quite alone, and don't have servants because I believe in equality, but can't stand having my cook on my visiting list. So here I am, and I'm third vice president of a working girls' club, and I do neighborhood work, and I am going to graduate from the Sloan Maternity some day, and, when nobody requires me as a trained nurse or spiritual adviser, I—I"—she flushed prettily—"I hope to write plays to educate the people—like this first play you heard me reading to myself. I hope to reach and arouse the public through the medium of the drama."

"Exactly," he said, fascinated.

"I am a Socialist," she said firmly; "I've been one for three months. It occurred so oddly. I was walking along Fifth Avenue

opposite the Lenox Club, and as I walked I happened to glance up at the club window—oh, I am very careful about doing such a thing, but my brother is sometimes there, and I rather like to see him with the head of his walking stick under his chin; he's so chubby and cunning——”

She smiled confidently at Todd; and Todd grew giddy.

“So I glanced up as I passed,” she continued; “but I didn't see my brother, only a rather horrid man with a monocle in one eye, staring at me——”

“Manners!” breathed Todd, electrified.

“Very, very bad manners,” she said unconsciously. “So I looked straight ahead and walked right on. . . . But—but—I began to have the queerest sensations a few moments later! I”—she hesitated, looking at Todd—“I was a very, very different sort of girl three months ago, Mr. Todd. I was like other women—thoughtless, light-hearted, unimaginative, mediocre, devoted to frivolity—and, suddenly, as I walked on, I began to feel myself changing, my whole character changing, and awaking into a strangely new and delightful personality!

... I wonder if you believe what I am saying?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Todd; "I believe it; I *know* it. Please go on."

"Thank you. Somehow I knew you would believe me. Somehow, the moment I saw you I knew I was not afraid of you—even though you shouted so abruptly and came clattering so fiercely upstairs. I—it's a curious thing—an almost incredible thing to admit—but do you know, Mr. Todd, that somehow your coming didn't astonish me very much?"

"D-didn't it?" stammered Todd rapturously.

"No. Not that I was expecting you—not that I ever even thought of you—even knew you by sight. Yet it seemed quite in order to see you come charging in here to my rescue. And when you told me your name I had an odd feeling that matters were happening as they ought to happen—as they were bound to happen. . . . I wonder whether you understand me?"

"Perfectly," he murmured, under the spell of her sweet sincerity.

"Very well, then; I will just say this: that

three months ago I was another woman, and to-day I am my real self—fresh from the chrysalis of the past, awakened from twenty years of emotionless immaturity to emerge into the world and bear my part of its sorrows and its burdens, and to do my part toward its betterment. And that is all, . . . about myself, . . . Mr. Todd.”

“Please, *please*, go on.”

“Why, what more is there to say?” she asked laughingly. “You know all about me now. You know I am absolutely unconventional, unafraid, and—and audacious enough to offer you a chair—at midnight—alone with me in this house.”

And she rose and indicated a chair on her left with a gesture of delicate audacity.

The mixture of Socialism and unconventionality combined with the charm and fearless poise of a young girl, bred in the world, produced an *ensemble* so sweet, so piquant, so adorable, that Todd sat bolt upright on his chair beside her, wrapped in a blissfully imbecile daze.

“I don’t care what an artificial and self-conscious society might think of this, do you, Mr. Todd?” she asked.

"Not a bit," said Todd. Her eyes were very friendly; her glance wandered over him with a confident but thoughtful curiosity.

"I am very glad you came," she said. "Will you come again?"

"Yes!!!!" exclaimed Todd so fervently that she flushed.

"I wonder whether you'd be interested in Settlement work—in my work here among the poor?" she ventured.

"I am," said Todd warmly. "I've a lot of—I—well, an uncle of mine left me some money. Do you want it?"

"Want it!" she repeated blankly.

"For the poor!"

"I—why, Mr. Todd—I couldn't—it is very generous——"

"But I want to spend it on all these Dagos, and gutter snipes!" he said earnestly. "I want to convert the yeggmen and be good to them with pamphlets and soup. I'll give 'em anything you say—new hats, gum drops, hospitals, anything you'd like 'em to enjoy."

His generous emotion set a faint pink fire in her cheeks.

"But it wouldn't do to give indiscriminately," she said, leaning a trifle nearer toward

him. "Besides, I don't quite see how I am going to accept your financial aid——"

"Please let me," he pleaded. "I—I've been wandering around loose for the last three months, making lots of money and having adventures, but I didn't know what I really wanted until I saw you."

"Me!"—the vivid tint spreading on her lovely face.

"Yes — I want — want you! — but I won't speak of that just now; I'll confine my suggestions to this business of first aid to the indigent Dago, and I hope you'll let me build a hospital for you——"

She lay back in her chair, blue eyes starry and wide, and the bright color grew and faded with every quick-drawn breath as she watched him, fascinated, while he spoke with all the eager boyish impulsiveness of a young man suddenly and hopefully in love.

For there was no chance to misunderstand; his every feature, every gesture told the story, and the light in his eyes betrayed it, and the very sound of his voice confessed it, and her own pulse mechanically echoed the avowal, beating out unsteadily its irrevocable confirmation.

Love! To come like this! Suddenly, swiftly, irresistibly, like this! Love!—to come so abruptly, filling his heart as he met her eyes, dominating him soul and body and mind, so that it usurped his own personality and enslaved every power of it, using his eyes and lips for its own purposes.

And the purpose of love was to make her understand, admit, believe, marvel, and be afraid.

She was afraid.

Then the love, newborn, looked out at her through his eyes while he was talking excitedly about hospitals; and she heard his words as in a dream, but sat spellbound under the revelation from his eyes.

He talked and talked and talked, and Heaven knows he was prosy—but she did not think so, lying back there in her chair, wide-eyed, thrilled, tremulous of lid and lip, as the undertone of love, sounding persistently through his platitudes, swept her like a caress, and set the rose fire creeping across her cheeks.

Socialism, equality, freedom, and the untrammelled expression of it, fearless confidence, the repudiation of all that is artificial:

these had been the vows she had taken. She understood, she remembered.

And now, with all the strength and instinct and passion of her young soul and heart, she was struggling against the creed she had confessed—struggling, bewildered, rejecting its confession from his lips.

Turmoil in the confessional—for her heart was that dim sanctuary; revolt in mind and body, and anathema for the penitent—as she rose, breathless, cheeks aflame, arms outstretched in a sudden gesture that at the same time silenced him and shielded herself—silenced him for an instant only; shielded herself very badly.

For—oh, incredible!—he had caught her hands in his, her soft, white hands, both of them, that twisted fiercely as though to hurt him, not to escape.

“All this talk,” he stammered, “means only one thing!”

“D-don’t say it!” she gasped.

“Will you not believe it?”

“I—yes! I know it is so; I know how it is with us—what has happened. But I cannot endure it—so quickly—to—to have you—take me—this way——”

"You are already taken," he whispered, mastering her hands.

"I know it—prisoner—in my own house."
... Her hands fell limp, she drew a deep, sweet breath, and slowly, very slowly, raised her eyes to his.

"Be merciful," she said. "The silk of the old *régime* still clothes me under these red rags of emancipation."

"I know," he said, his soul in his eyes.

Then, paling, she raised her hands, and he drew them close against his lips.

"Good night," she whispered.

"To-morrow?"

"Y-yes."

"And always, after that? Always? Forever and ever—until——"

"Yes."

About one o'clock that morning, Manners, squatting distractedly upon a bench in the park, perceived a shadowy form, apparently a prey to religious exaltation, wandering about under the trees, arms upflung, face lifted to heaven.

"Todd!" he cried, bounding to his feet. Then the desire for battle overwhelmed him,

and he charged headlong upon Todd and assaulted him. And they had a splendid time there all alone under the stars.

"Beast!" panted Manners, blocking an upper cut and countering. And Todd came back joyously on the nose, and they mixed it again until, breathless, speechless, and satisfied, they staggered apart and sat down on the same bench.

"Careful about your nose, old fellow," panted Todd; "don't hold it over my knees."

So Manners held his nose over the grass like a gentleman, and Todd lent him another handkerchief.

"That was fine, wasn't it?" said Manners. "We must do it again with six-ounce gloves——"

"Certainly," replied Todd affectionately, as Manners rose and started toward the street. And, linking his arm in his friend's arm, he looked up blissfully at the stars.

After a long time, during which, from moment to moment, Manners furtively pressed the borrowed handkerchief to his nose, they came into Fifth Avenue and headed southward toward the Lenox Club.

"And now," said Manners, "perhaps you had better tell me what happened to you."

But Todd only shook his head dreamily and raised his eyes to the star-set sky.

"No," he murmured, "not until it is announced."

Manners turned perfectly cold.

"Announced!" he repeated threateningly.

"Yes; to Billy West's sister—*not* the pretty one. God bless you, William."

But Manners was past all speech.



CHAPTER V

A GUILTY MAN

IT was now generally known, in the Lenox Club, that Manners had suddenly discovered himself to be endowed with the uncanny power of influencing his fellow-beings through mental suggestion.

The strange experiences of Eric Kelvin, the amazing adventures of Dudley Todd, were now almost the sole topic of conversation in the club.

Outwardly, the attitude and apparently the

friendship of the club members had not changed toward Manners; inwardly he had become an object of fearful curiosity to them. And the awe of him continued.

When he entered a room abruptly an agreeable sensation of dread seized every man present.

When he punched the service button with the ferrule of his walking stick dozens of eyes observed him furtively; when the ice tinkled in his glass, and the contents of the siphon fizzed in it, the more timid and callow members effervesced in sympathy.

Yet even the timid ones never became frightened enough to avoid Manners, and in the hearts of the bolder men grew a curiously delightful foreboding which became, at moments, a horrid sort of hope that Manners might practice his necromancy upon them, give them the dreaded mental absent treatment for their several shortcomings, and command for them a few more of the delicate and beautiful visions which he had summoned out of the vasty metropolitan deep as lovely life comrades for Kelvin and Todd.

For those bidden to the wedding of Kelvin wandered back, stunned by the bride's young

beauty. Those summoned to rejoice at the bridal feast of Todd returned to the club maddened with the hope that Manners might meddle with them; and, as a matter of fact, a deputation of five confirmed bachelors did actually approach him as he was in the act of consuming his cereal breakfast, with the bashful suggestion that he practice absent treatment on them while they were downtown, and guarantee them a bride apiece.

But Manners, sensitive on the subject, became angry, and the disconcerted deputation fled at his first word of rebuke, fearful that he might transform them into a bunch of something obnoxious, and entertaining in their secret souls no doubt of his ability to do so.

Manners had become sensitive on the subject of his unusual power. What he had done to Kelvin and his bride, and what they had done to him, had shaken him up. On the heels of that had come the *dénouement* of Todd's case with Billy West's sister; and although these two matters had fortunately left nobody miserable except himself, he remembered remorsefully the practices he had attempted upon others, and his curiosity as to

what might happen to the attractive but unknown maidens whom he had treated mentally without their knowledge amounted at moments to a sort of terror.

Such a moment had come to him a day or two before as, according to his custom, he sat searching the columns of the newspapers for any reports of extraordinary or outrageous conduct on the part of hitherto decorous young women.

And he had encountered a paragraph which disturbed him greatly—an account of the illogical behavior of a youthful orphan maiden, whose suddenly developed eccentricities were now the gossip of the Berkshires.

This paragraph he had carefully cut out, meaning to show it to young Stephen Gray, who had recently acquired a country place in the Berkshires near Lenox; and so when Gray arrived, and they met at the club for breakfast, Manners took occasion to produce the clipping and reread it to himself in the faint hope of persuading himself that he had no hand in the matter, and that, after all, he need not mention it to Gray. Yet, curiously enough, he was perfectly possessed to talk about it to somebody, and once more

he lay back in his chair and, dropping his monocle from his eye, began to devour the quarter column of print, leaving his innocent cereal untasted.

Young Gray sipped his coffee and watched him. Manners had treated Gray experimentally, but he didn't know that Gray knew it. He had treated him for a conspicuous absence of artistic common sense—Gray being in the sign and advertising business, which covered town and country with the disfigurements of Glory Soap and Bylow's Baby Food.

As Manners had noticed no diminution of billboard atrocities in town, suburb, or country, he began to believe that his mental suggestions to Gray had either failed or, like wireless messages, had gone astray and been intercepted by somebody for whom they were not intended; so, seeing no particular mental or physical improvement in Gray, he had not thought it necessary to confess to him.

Meanwhile Gray, putting two and two together, became suspicious that he had been one of Manners's victims. His sudden hatred for his own vandal business strengthened the suspicion; certainty settled upon him when he found himself the possessor of a farmhouse

studio near Lenox and an unsuspected talent for art; and, amazed and, at times, furious with himself, he spent every spare moment in his new country studio, where he began to turn out landscapes in oils, marines in water colors, statuettes in clay and wax and marble, at a rate calculated to alarm an Art Nouveau factory.

And meanwhile his advertising business was being rapidly ruined by his neglect of it, and a rival company was taking what remained of his business away from him.

But all these things he kept tucked away in the back of his head, making no sign to Manners or to anybody of what was happening. And every week or two he came to town to sell his pictures. In vain.

Now, he sat there, sipping his coffee at intervals, quietly interested in the growing uneasiness which was creeping over Manners's handsome features. And, as Manners read on, the conviction that he was responsible for what he was reading gripped him till he shuddered.

"Well," asked Gray, "is it the market that's upsetting your nerves?"

"Upsetting who?" demanded Manners with

a start; then, attempting to recover his self-possession, he leaned one elbow carelessly on the table and pretended to yawn.

"Your elbow's in your oatmeal," observed Gray coldly.

Confused and humiliated, Manners suffered a servant to remove the traces of mishap.

"William," said Gray curiously, "you are acting like a criminal in danger of detection. Besides, you look like one. What's the matter? What's that clipping?"

Suddenly guilt overcame Manners, and with it the instinctive and panicky determination to conceal his guilt by loquacity—to smother suspicion by actually inviting a discussion of his crime. A mad desire to talk about it overcame a cooler judgment; the scared and conscience-ridden malefactor was predominant in him, fascinated by the evil that he had wrought, terrified that it had been made public in print.

And even now, shocked as he had been by Gray's apparently innocent inquiry, Manners knew that he could not long have refrained from calling somebody's attention to the report in the newspapers; could not have resist-

ed the mania to drag in the subject that haunted his conscience.

"As a matter of fact," he said frankly, "I was a little upset by a very sad occurrence which I've been reading about in the paper. You know, Stephen, what a sensitive and sympathetic nature I have. Any misfortune that happens in the world affects me violently. It's foolish, it's unmanly, but—b-b-but——"

"Don't blubber," said Gray; "I can't understand what you're saying."

"I c-can't help it," repeated Manners, dashing the unmanly moisture from his monocle, "because I've just been reading the saddest paragraph in the p-p-paper——"

He choked, adding with an effort: "It's about such a foolishness——"

"A—*what*?"

"It's about a young girl—a certain Miss Valdes—of Lenox——"

"Miss Valdes!"

"Y-yes. She lives up your way. You don't happen to know her, I hope——?"

"Do you mean that very young girl—you don't mean Diana Valdes!" exclaimed Gray.

"Yes, I do."

"William! *What* has happened to her?" cried Gray, half rising to his feet in his excitement.

"Do you know her?"

"No—that is, I've seen her every summer for years! Ever since she was a child——"

"Then, if that's all, you're making quite a hullabaloo," returned the other, taking refuge from his own growing alarm in the effrontery of bad temper. "I thought at least you must be engaged to her by the way you began jumping around the room."

He paused, but Gray made no observation; and, supposing he had squelched him, Manners went on:

"According to this newspaper, it would appear that Miss Valdes has been exhibiting symptoms of classical eccentricity— What's the matter, Gray? Did anything sting you?"

"What symptoms?" demanded Gray, ignoring the question.

"Why," continued Manners, moistening his lips, dry from increasing fright as he began to realize Gray's personal interest in the affair, "she's got into the habit of going off by herself for days at a time; hiding herself in the fields and bushes and woods of her

big country place there. You've heard that she has a huge and beautiful wooded estate——"

"Yes; go on!"

"W-well, don't shout at me that way, Stephen."

"I'm not shouting. Besides, this dining room is empty. Go on!"

"You *did* shout; and my nerves are not what they once were. . . . What are you glaring about? I'm going on, I tell you. Anybody'd think you were in love with her, fidgeting about like that! I know her as well as you do; I've never seen her, but Mrs. Kelvin knows her and has told me all about her. So don't get gay with me, Stephen."

And he waved the newspaper clipping and continued, sometimes quoting from the account, sometimes delivering a *résumé* of the affair in his own language:

"Her servants became very anxious over her repeated and prolonged disappearances, scouring the woods and hills of the estate for some trace of their beautiful mistress——" And, turning a wavering eye on Gray: "What the deuce do you suppose they found out she was doing, Stephen?"

"Go on," responded Gray between his teeth, "or I'll hit you with the toast rack!"

"I am. You're in a nasty temper this A.M. Well, then; Miss Valdes, it seems, has concluded to become a goddess——"

"A *what*?"

"A goddess. Didn't you hear what I said? She insists that it is the only sane, wholesome, and logical outdoor life to lead. And so she runs about the woods with only a bow and arrow, and a half moon stuck in her hair——"

"William!"

"Well, that's what the paper says," faltered Manners. "You can read it yourself, you unmannerly dub! That's what it says——"

"Wearing only a b-b-bow and arrow and a crescent!" whimpered Gray, utterly unnerved.

"Na-aw! Who said that? She wears some drapery, of course, and sandals, and she chases the dappled deer. A *Tribune* reporter caught sight of her running like fury——"

"Do you—does that fool newspaper mean to make us believe that the indolent, indifferent, and statuesquely classical Miss Valdes goes racing over the Berkshires c-clad in cheese cloth and a crescent?"

"Sure thing," replied Manners despondently. "She's a changed girl; she tells people she's invented a new health idea, and she calls it the Olympian cure; and the way you do it is to go out with as little clothing on as possible, and chase everything that runs away from you."

"William!" cried Gray distractedly, "do you believe she has buzz wheels? *Do* you?"

"Nonsense!" said Manners, paling; "it's only that she now prefers, in her leisure moments, to go bounding about like Diana instead of taking ornamental siestas in hammocks, or lolling about all day under a parti-colored sunshade. Here, read it yourself," he added, thrusting the newspaper clipping at Gray, and employing his handkerchief to wipe the cold perspiration from his visage.

Gray took the clipping and read in horrified silence. Manners watched him, trying vainly the while to manage a roll and a cup of coffee. Both choked him; he couldn't eat; his appetite had vanished with his peace of mind in the certainty that this unfortunate girl was one of his hitherto unknown victims.

"What do you think about it?" asked Manners wretchedly.

"Think of it?" repeated Gray.

"Y-yes; what do *you* think makes her act like that? W-w-wheels?"

Gray turned red and his eyes began to look dangerous, but he said very calmly: "Nix for the wheels. If a girl wants to do the unconventional within the walls of her own estate, I think she might be allowed to without all this clamor in the newspapers."

"S-s-so do I," said Manners with a shiver. "I think so, too."

"If," continued Gray, "Miss Valdes wants to wear cheese-cloth skirts and Grecian sandals and go about potting sparrows with a bow and arrow, why shouldn't she? The old Greek costume is far healthier and far more beautiful than the skirts and corsets of to-day. And, as for the archery practice, why not? It's fashionable to revive the quaint pastimes and sports of the past. They are taking up falconry in France; they ride the lists in the Cammargue; you've heard of the Marathon race, haven't you? And of the Olympian games, where they are hurling the discus again?"

"Certainly," nodded Manners hopefully, "and even in the time of Nero they played Red Lion."

"Well, then," continued Gray, "it's probably quite natural and instinctive for Miss Valdes to revive in herself the charming and graceful pastimes of Diana." He paused and fixed a withering eye upon Manners, who promptly began to tremble. "I say it is *probably* natural for Miss Valdes to do this. But if it isn't natural—if some confounded, impertinent, mischief-making, idle, and wealthy young pup has ventured mentally to suggest to this innocent girl any such games and practices——"

Manners, pale and astounded at the discovery of his guilt, pushed back his chair violently and rose to his feet prepared for fight.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Gray. "Sit down!"

"D-d-do you c-care for her?"

"Ya-as," said Gray, "I do! Sit down or I'll attack you!"

"What are you g-going to do about it?" stammered Manners, dropping instinctively into the popular attitude of self-defense.

"William! William! I don't know what I am going to do about it. I want to do something primitive—throw everything on

the table at you, for example—but I'm not going to; I want to run after you and, at the end of a savage and terrible chase, corner you and destroy you. But I'm not going to do that, either. As for delivering you to the police, what's the use? They wouldn't believe it of you. Wizard! Witch doctor! Conjuror——"

"Besides, they might believe something queerer about *you*," retorted Manners with dignity. And, becoming irritated: "See here; I don't mind the names you call me, but, if you think of assaulting me, I'll fight with the fury of despair. Ask Todd. Besides, I'm horribly mortified and sorry for what I did to Miss Valdes——"

"What's the good of being sorry and mortified?" demanded Gray, hammering on the table with doubled fist. "She's the most attractive girl I ever saw, and you've turned her into a side show, and given her the ambitions of a spear carrier in the 'Black Crook'!"

"But you said yourself that it was natural for her to act that way——"

"*You* put her up to it! You voodoo doctor!"

"Well—what if I did? Isn't it fashionable

to revive ancient sports and pastimes? Besides, what have I ever done to you to be injuriously described as a voodoo——”

“You impudent dabbler in second-hand magic!” shouted Gray in impotent fury. “You’ve ruined my advertising and publicity business! That’s what you’ve done to me! And you’ve turned me into a tenth-rate landscape painter! Even this club rejects my pictures as gifts——”

“Were those awful daubs *yours*?” exclaimed Manners.

“Yes, they were! And I stood by and saw you laugh at them when the board of governors rejected them! And now you’ve taken a lovely, scarcely mature orphan maiden, celebrated in Lenox for her lazy repose, languid beauty, and absent-minded indifference, and turned her into a classical tomboy, and set her racing madly about the backwoods like a demented white rabbit with the pip!”

Manners stared at him in horror, opened his mouth to deny everything; then, as though stunned, dropped both arms on the table and laid his head between them.

Gray gazed at him for a moment enraged, but after a while his visage softened.

"I don't mean to be too hard on you," he said. "What can we do about this matter?"

Manners moaned.

"Something's got to be done, of course," insisted Gray; "and you'd better begin! If you don't, I'll run at you!"

"I can't!" groaned Manners; "I don't know how to work it backward; I can't reverse mental suggestion. Great Heaven, man, if I could, don't you think I would? Do you think I'd let you go on painting those awful pictures? Do you think I'd permit this young girl to risk catching cold in her cheese cloth, buskins, and crescent? I'd rather see Bylow's Baby Food frescoed all over the new public library than give you the contract to decorate it. I thought there was nothing worse than Glory Soap. There is; and you've produced it! I treated you for lack of artistic appreciation, expecting you to clear the Hudson Valley of your defacing billboards. But you immediately began to produce Fourth Avenue Corots, and your technic was not Fontainebleau but Bylow——"

"Let up on my art," protested Gray, incensed. "It may not be good, but I like it. And I must say it's pretty shabby of you,

William, to set me painting landscapes and then never even offer to buy one——”

“Gray! I *can't* buy one of those things! I can't stand 'em——”

“You've got to! You owe me something. My advertising business is utterly ruined. It's only fair that you create a market for my pictures. I tell you, Manners, you ought to begin collecting my landscapes for a private gallery of your own; that's the way to launch me; that's the way to create a public *furor* for my works. Let it be known widely that the wealthy and fashionable young connoisseur, William Manners, Esquire, has, with greatest difficulty, indefatigable patience, and lavish expenditure of money, succeeded in collecting a hundred of my masterpieces——”

“*Yours!!!*”

“Exactly,” said Gray calmly. “That's how you can make partial reparation. I've got to go on painting; I can't help it as long as you are unable to reverse your mental treatment; and as long as I go on painting you ought to go on buying my pictures, unless you can create a healthy market for me. How else am I to live, now that you've ruined my sign business?”

Manners, very pale, mopped the starting perspiration from his forehead.

"It's horrible," he said under his breath. "The public will think I'm crazy——"

"Not after you have bought a hundred or two of my pictures," said Gray cheerfully. "As soon as the public reads about it, I'll be all right. And, William, perhaps you had better begin to acquire my works immediately. I've nearly thirty upstairs—the ones that the club wouldn't accept as a gift——"

Manners convulsively covered his eyes with his hands.

"Be a man!" said Gray kindly. "Come upstairs and let me explain them to you. Begin by purchasing two or three. Easy does it. Get the habit. And by and by you may find it rather interesting to acquire 'em. They're not so bad to look at when you get accustomed to them. It's purely a matter of habit. *I* like them; I really do. Cheer up; you may come to care for them some day."

Manners lifted a haggard face.

"I—I suppose it's only fair," he said. "I didn't know I'd ruined your sign business, Stephen. If I have it's only decent for me to

do what I can. H-how many pictures did you say you had left unsold?"

"They're all unsold," replied Gray. "I've simply got to sell some to make a living. Of course, if you feel the way you do, I hate to have you make a collection——"

"I'll do it! I'll try my best to make you popular and fashionable if it's possible. I'll ask Kelvin and Todd and Billy West and Kelly Jones to buy 'em, too! I'll engage a press agent for you. I'll do anything—only, you won't mind if I—I dispose of my gallery after you're famous, will you, Stephen? It would kill me to live very long with those things; it really would."

So it was arranged between them that a campaign be started immediately to alleviate the financial condition of Stephen Gray; and they adjourned to Gray's room to agree upon the plan and try to accustom Manners to the sight of the thirty pictures.

About noon they lunched together—that is, Stephen lunched—but it was empty form for Manners to sit at the table, as his mind was distracted with his dreadful responsibility for the classical antics of Miss Valdes, and also upset by an inspection of Gray's pictures.

"Awful, isn't it?" he repeated again and again to Gray. "Nobody will ever care to marry such a girl as that! She'll never find a man who can stand for that sort of thing. I—I suppose, in decency, I ought to go up there to Lenox and dress up in billy-goat skins and pretend to be Pan, and offer to marry her——"

"You don't have to," observed Gray coldly.

"But it's the only reparation I can make——"

"I'll do any repairing necessary," said Gray firmly.

"*You?*"

"Certainly."

"What are you going to do? You probably won't be able to get near her if she's ranging the woods—unless you dress up like a faun or a water nymph——"

Gray dropped knife and fork. "Do you think so?" he asked, agitated.

"I'm afraid so. You see, when I noticed that indolent-eyed, languid young girl rolling past the club window in her victoria, I gave her a vigorous dose of mental persuasion. All the fuss and feathery furbelow and nonsense that decorated her I suggested that she

shed in favor of classical simplicity. 'Go out and range the fragrant woods and fields!' I insisted. 'Kick off those French heels, and be as unconventional and free-limbed as Diana!' O Stephen, I didn't mean to be literal! I didn't intend to have her act the way she's acting. I—my intentions were of the best—the purest, the most chaste— Stephen, you know that Diana *was* chaste——"

Gray gazed at his omelet. "She got stuck on Endymion," he observed gloomily. "See here, William, the thing for us to do is to go up there to the Berkshires, call upon Miss Valdes, confess frankly the horrible wrong you have done her——"

"What good will it do?" demanded Manners, aghast. "I—I'm perfectly willing to endure her scorn and reproach and hatred, but all that won't prevent her from continuing to behave like a goddess——"

"Don't you think so?"

"No, I don't. I don't know any antidote for what I've done. If I could reverse treatment I would, but I can't, and there are no anti-goddess pills that I ever heard of. Only cold weather can make her dress warmly again, I fear."

"Then," said Gray resolutely, "I'll marry her, anyway, if I can—if she'll have me. What do I care whether she chooses to roam free and untrammelled in a classical costume of cheese cloth when the weather permits? It will always be inside private grounds, and, besides, I, personally, like Grecian costume and customs. Why not?—they're artistic, and as art is about all I live for now it will suit me perfectly. So I'm going up to Lenox to-night. And you must come, too."

"I don't want to," said Manners in a voice which approached a whimper.

"Oh, you've got to go to her and explain," insisted Gray. "It can do no harm, and it may, perhaps, do some good. So tell the valet to pack your suit case and trunk. . . . After all, I'm not so very sorry you did this to us. If you hadn't I probably would never have gathered enough courage to ask Miss Valdes to marry a man who had only known her by sight for years, and whose business was as low down as mine was. As it is, I think I can venture to ask her to consider the respectful advances of an artist——"

"D-don't let her see your pictures," muttered Manners.

"I most certainly shall," returned Gray very haughtily. "I'll sail under no false oil colors; I'll practice no deceptions. If she takes me she takes me with all my faults and pictures. She will know exactly what she's getting; she won't plunge blindly into matrimony. . . . And, William, I am wondering whether my pictures are as bad as they are painted? After all, you don't know everything, do you? Suppose, after all, I've been founding a new school which nobody yet appreciates or understands?"

"Perhaps," groaned Manners, collapsing in his chair.



CHAPTER VI

THE ABSENT-MINDED GODDESS



ON a beautiful summer afternoon two young men approached the great door of a stately country mansion a few miles from Lenox. Both young men carried suit cases. One wore a frock coat, silk hat, an old-fashioned string tie, and a false beard.

To their formal inquiries the sepulchral servant at the door replied, in a voice like the sound of a half-gulped sob, that Miss Valdes was not at home.

"Might we see the park and the gardens?" inquired one of the young men. "I would like to have Dr. Manners become familiar with the—ah—environments——"

The butler said that visitors were permitted until five.

A parlor maid conducted them to the terrace. Her eyes were red as though she had been weeping. Another maid appeared and piloted them through the summer conservatories. *Her* eyes were red.

Then a gardener came to take them through the graperies; and *his* eyes were red.

"What's the matter with everybody?" ventured Gray at last.

"Doin's," said the gardener briefly.

The gardener's wife received them at her cottage door and conducted them through the celebrated vegetable garden. *She* had been weeping.

"I suppose," suggested Manners, wagging his big, false beard, "that you've been crying on account of the doin's, haven't you?"

"Y-yes," sniffed the woman; "but how do you know?"

"Friends of the family—physicians," mut-

tered Gray. "I mean that I am not exactly, but this medical gentleman is old Dr. Manners——"

"Oh, sir!" broke in the woman, clasping her hands, "perhaps you can tell me, then, if they have found my dear young mistress! We are all so frightened; Miss Valdes has been gone three days this time, and if she hadn't told us she'd dismiss us if we bothered her again we'd have went for the town constable and the fambly doctor."

Manners began to shake; Gray wagged his head.

"So she is still in the woods?" he asked gravely.

"Yes, sir, we suppose so—judging from the state of the pantry last night."

"Sad, very, very sad," he observed. "But old Dr. Manners and I are extremely hopeful—ah—I may say almost sanguine, that Miss Valdes may return this evening. That is why we are here; but you are not to say anything, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are those the woods Miss Valdes usually haunts?"

"Sir?"

"Those umbrageous solitudes over there on the hill—is that where your mistress is accustomed to seclude herself?"

"She goes into them woods, doctor—yes, sir."

"Quite so. Thank you." And, turning gravely to Manners: "Now, doctor, if you are ready."

And very solemnly, arm in arm, the two young men set off across the fields, carrying their suit cases. The sun was hot; perspiration bedewed Manners's countenance.

"This beard and this accursed silk hat are fierce," he said, "and my black frock coat weighs tons. I don't think it is necessary for me to——"

"Yes, it is. You look the part. Besides, she'll be more likely to listen to you if you look like that. Do you remember what you are to say when you meet her?"

"Yes," said Manners sulkily; "I'm to say that I'm old Dr. Manners, specialist on all kinds of feminine fidgets, and that if she doesn't go back home and stop behaving like a goddess, I'll commit her to my sanatorium."

"Well, try to put it more medically,

William. Whew! This shade is refreshing!"—as they entered the woods. "Isn't this stunning?—these fine old trees and rocks——"

Manners was down on all fours drinking out of a brook that came rippling through the woodland silence; and as he eagerly lapped up the icy water his silk hat fell off and danced roguishly away downstream. Gray brought it back.

"When we sight her," he said, "I'll hide, and you advance and try to reason with her; and if there's nothing doing then I'll put on these pink tights and the billy-goat coat, and tie a ribbon across my forehead, and begin to play on my fife, and let her discover me by the brook."

"You ought to have had a reed pipe," said Manners doubtfully. But Gray seemed confident that his fife was just as classical. Besides, he could play "Rally Around the Flag" on the fife.

When Manners had drunk his fill and removed the icy drops that twinkled on his nose and on the point of his false beard, they moved forward, rapidly at first, then cautiously, listening, alert, wary as men ought to

be who were liable at any moment to encounter a goddess in the next thicket.

"Any signs?" whispered Manners, picking up his silk hat which a young tree had playfully snatched from his head and deftly punctured.

"No; did you hear anything?" questioned Gray with trembling lips, peering forward.

Manners, after vainly attempting to smooth the nap of his hat, crammed it firmly on his head.

"She's probably camping along this brook somewhere," he said. "You find game along water courses, and probably it's the same with goddesses. Hark!"

"Hark!" repeated Gray in a whisper.

Very far away a twig had snapped sharply; then the woodland silence fell over all—a stillness the more profound for the ceaseless sound of the shallow brook slipping swiftly over silver sands.

"Hush!" breathed Manners through his false beard, hand to ear, as though intent on listening to something off stage. Gray glanced at him with artistic disapproval; the attitude was admirable, but the top hat clashed with the background.

"It actually hurts me to look at you," he said. "Come on; I can't hear anybody making a noise like a goddess."

They stole stealthily forward, Indian file, Manners leading through the fragrant tangle and holding on his hat with one hand.

A rabbit, bouncing up and hopping noisily away over the dead leaves, almost paralyzed them; the thundering whirl of a partridge halted them again with a shock.

"If—if those little creatures make all that noise," panted Manners, "w-what sort of an uproar do you suppose a scared goddess will make? She'll go off like a regiment of cavalry, I suppose——"

"S-s-st!" cautioned Gray, listening off stage in his turn. A distant crashing sounded far in the dim forest depths, nearer, louder, suddenly lost, then startling in its distinctness.

"S-s-something's coming on a jump!" faltered Manners. "W-which way had we better run, Stephen?"

Before Gray could reply, a deer crossed the brook at full speed, flag up, and continued onward, taking most prodigious bounds into the leafy thickets beyond.

Manners recovered his speech after a sec-

ond or two. "I just hate to be startled," he said fretfully. "Everything in nature seems to delight in jarring you."

Gray, who had been watching a low wooded crest to the right, suddenly squatted behind a barrier of low fir trees.

"There she is!" he hissed. "She'll cross the brook above us, where that deer crossed! Quick, Manners! It's up to you to do what you can!"

Manners gaped vacantly at a swiftly speeding glimmer of white emerging from the distant foliage on the hill. Gray muttered: "Run upstream, idiot!" and gave him a violent shove; and Manners, following the direction in which he had been unceremoniously projected, crammed his silk hat over his ears and cantered on, suit case in one hand, long, black coat flapping. And the next moment he saw the goddess in full chase.

She was a tall, lithe girl, clothed in the white, heavily plaited body blouse and short skirt of the classical Grecian huntress. Arms and neck flashed like polished ivory, and above her big, gray eyes a heavy mass of bronze hair whipped the wind.

Hopping hopefully upstream, Manners

emerged into view, and, as she caught sight of him, he attempted to bow; but that was a difficult matter while running, for his hat was jammed on hard.

The girl halted in a flash, eyes widening, scarlet lips parted; and as Manners wrenched off his hat with a conciliatory flourish, and dropped his suit case, panting, she stood for an instant like a slender silver birch rooted among the shaggy giants of the pines.

Then a swift frown bent her delicate, straight brows inward; and she whipped an arrow from the quiver and fitted the nock to the string of the bent bow.

"Good Heavens!" panted Manners; "you are not going to shoot, are you?"

"What are you doing in my woods?" she asked in a clear, menacing voice. "Are you a tramp?"

"I—I'm a doctor—old Dr. Manners."

"A doctor?"

"Certainly," said Manners, summoning all his dignity. "I have come here from New York, profoundly interested and moved by the pathological aspects of your evident condition——"

"What!"



“What are you doing in my woods?”

...now that our
...not caused
...is why I have
...~~admit~~—to confess

...word.
...three months
...minating confes-
...make. I am
...error at myself.
...all for this
...now obsessing
...ession of guilt."
...repeated; "I—

...and solemnly.
...girl—idle,
...absorbed,
...ment, with the
...ambition of a

...a little
...day

I saw you, rolling along in your victoria on Fifth Avenue, all aflutter with lace and furbelows and knickknacks and beribboned whatnots. What you were was perfectly apparent to me in your face and figure and attitude and dress. And I thought it a pity; and—and I fixed my eyes on you—and—and——”

“W-what?” she faltered.

“Changed you!” he said, still cautiously approaching her. “I concentrated upon you the powerful, intellectual batteries of my mind! I altered you by hurling after you wave after wave of mental suggestion. I willed that you become vigorous and active and athletic! I—unfortunately urged you to an emulation of the classical ladies of Greek mythology. I didn’t mean to have you influenced so morally and literally, Miss Valdes——”

“*You did this to me!!!*”

“Alas!” he sighed, continuing his way toward her.

“To *me!!*”—gazing at him in slowly flushed wonder. “This insolence—this shame—Stand still! Stand where you are!”

Suddenly the gray lightning flashed in her

eyes; she whipped the arrow across the string, drew it to its head, and deliberately opened fire at him.

"Leave these woods!" she cried. "Leave instantly!" And a blunt arrow rapped him smartly across the ribs and rebounded rattling on the stones of the brook.

Manners grasped his suit case and with one frantic bound cleared the brook. Blunted arrows rattled a lively tattoo all over him as he fled; Gray, from his hiding place in the fir thicket, saw his friend pass at a maddened gallop, the air around him singing thick with arrows.

"Good Lord!" he thought, appalled; "what a very unusual sort of a girl she is!"

He had—seeing how matters were turning—concluded that Manners's mission would be useless. There remained only one way to make amends to Miss Valdes, as he understood it, and that was to offer himself, hand and heart, to this beautiful but eccentric girl, barred by her eccentricity from the faintest chance of matrimony with a normal man of her own caste.

To that end, and during Manners's confession of guilt, he had hurriedly divested him-

self of his fashionable apparel, drawn on the pink silk tights and sandals, and swathing his figure in a goatskin rug, he secreted his suit case in the bushes and seated himself on the moss, fingering his fife and watching the outcome of Manners's mission.

But the abrupt termination of the parley and the shocking manner of his friend's retreat frightened him. A flight of arrows rebounding from his own pink silk attire did not seem very attractive; he sat quite still on the moss, fife inserted between his lips, hesitating, and peeping nervously through the foliage where his goddess stood, a rosy-cheeked vision in white, speeding the last arrow in the wake of the crashing but now invisible Manners.

When she sent the last feathered messenger of vengeance into the golden gloom of the trees, she stood for a moment rigid, erect, a statuesque and charming miracle, left arm outstretched clutching the bow, right arm drawn back, her slender white fingers, from which she had just loosed the bowstring, brushing the little close-set ear.

Then the snowy vision of dead ages slowly dissolved, and out of it emerged a very lovely

and very modern young girl, graceful, relaxed, laughing now, now listening, the smile tremulous on lid and lip.

The distant racket of Manners's flight died away; again the silence filled with the low murmur of the stream, and the girl came forward and looked down into the water, and stood so, thoughtfully, her head bent, the curve of her neck dazzling under the bronze crown of silky hair.

Slim, distractingly pretty in her white tunic, which fell in close folds below her knees, she seemed absolutely without blemish there in the warm, green-gold glow of the leaves.

Head, shoulders, arms, the straight young limbs, all were of one exquisite and symmetrical *ensemble*, pure, serene, flawless as the marble out of which she might well have stepped, so Greek, so perfect, so divine she seemed.

Then the spell broke; from the white doe-skin pouch at her side she slowly drew something flat and square, and pensively pressed it to her delicate red lips. It was a ham sandwich.

Except for that anachronistic intrusion of modern realism — the abrupt transformation

from the celestial to the human—Gray understood that he would never have dared hope, or speak of hope to himself, much less to his divinity.

But the magic had faded into a more wonderful and delightful actuality; with a thrill he beheld his pagan goddess eating a sandwich—a wholesome, health-giving sandwich constructed of home-made bread and the rose-tinted residue of the domestic pig. From Olympia she had come fluttering down to the world, alighting daintily upon the same earth that he inhabited. And, if it pleased her divinity to set her small, white teeth in a ham sandwich, perhaps—perhaps, she might not drive a living specimen of the human kind from her with accurate arrows!

“First,” he said to himself, “I’ll naïvely discover my whereabouts through the music of my fife. Then I’ll admit that I’m a fellow-victim of mythological obsession. And then—then we’ll see——”

And, grasping his fife with determination, and watching her askance through the leaves, he produced a loud, shrill toot.

The effect upon the goddess was electrical. For a second she sat absolutely motionless,

stiffened to a statue, the half-bitten sandwich suspended in mid-air; then, as he blew hopefully into his fife, she sprang erect, incredulous, astounded.

Gurgling tootles continued to proceed from the fir thicket. Like a wild doe at gaze, she stared at the spot, seeing nothing. And all the while Gray, laboring faithfully, elicited from the fife his version of "Rally Around the Flag, Boys," and kept a furtive eye on her, determined to seize his secreted suit case and fly if his goddess approached him with arrows instead of curiosity and questions.

She was approaching now, on tiptoe, noiselessly, gracefully as a curious dryad, one finger classically raised and pressed flat across her lips.

"Just like a Greuze picture," thought Gray, captivated; but he continued to toot, and his goddess continued to advance over the moss with noiseless steps, bow in hand.

At length Gray realized with a delicious thrill that she stood close behind him looking down at him over the low evergreen hedge; and his fingers danced madly over the stops, and he puffed out his cheeks and blew his whole love-smitten soul into the fife,

not knowing whether he was going to receive a blunt arrow in the neck, or a civil greeting.

"In about a minute," he thought to himself, "I'll turn carelessly around and become transfixed with wonder at seeing her there."

And in about a minute he did—and so naturally that the wonder and delight in his attractive face were too real to doubt, and really were absolutely genuine, so wholly beautiful was the engaging and youthful face gazing down at him over the hemlocks.

"What in the world are you doing in my woods?" she asked softly, the pretty astonishment in her face deepening.

He stood up, fife in hand, the goatskin falling classically over him from his shoulders.

"The stupidity of civilization bores me," he said, smiling. "I heard that you were sensible enough to revert to the old simplicity of the Golden Age, and you gave me the courage to be myself. So I came into these woods to listen to the stream and play on my fife—meaning no harm. Do you mind?"

"N-no, I don't mind. Who are you?"

"I am an artist, Stephen Gray."

"An artist!"

"Yes."

"Oh," she said, nodding her head, "I can understand artists doing anything. And I don't think I mind your coming into my woods. . . . You — you are dressed like a faun. Why?"

"I feel like one—sometimes," he said, unconsciously touching the tips of his ears as though to find out whether they had grown pointed and hairy.

"Do you? Do you really feel pagan at moments?"

"Very. Do you?"

"Every now and then I do—periodically," she admitted frankly. "And, when I do, I come out into my own fresh, sweet woods, and—and I behave like the mischief, I suppose — according to conventional ideas. . . . Do you know my name?"

"Diana," he said very gently, and with a faint accent of caress. For the gray eyes into which he looked were bewitching him, and her voice was stealing his senses from him, and the delicate lips, resting so sensitively upon one another, were most eloquent when dumb, calling him, calling to him in the oldest language in the world.

He, too, seemed to fascinate her with an innocent curiosity. She stepped through the aromatic evergreen barrier that separated them and confronted him with clear, direct gray eyes.

"Tell me," she said, "where did you hear about me?"

"In Lenox."

"Do you live there?"

"Near there."

"You have a studio?"

"Yes—a sort of one."

"And—and did you ever before see me?"

"Yes—often—ever since you were a child."

She was silent, gazing searchingly into his eyes. Then she laughed:

"I think I like you. Shall I sit down?"

She seated herself with the unconscious grace of a child; he stood a moment; then she looked up confidently, and he dropped beside her on the thick, green moss.

"Isn't it delicious to escape from the commonplace?" she asked frankly. "To escape from noise, and ugliness, and the vulgarity of ostentation into *this*? It is strange that the remedy never occurred to me until this spring. I was indolent, languid, mentally dis-

satisfied, and all I knew was that I was bored with the world in which I had not figured very long.

"Then suddenly it occurred to me that I had a right to escape. It was as though a voice had abruptly awakened me from the dull inertia of mere existence. A strong, wholesome, overwhelming desire for freedom seized me—the desire for untrammelled freedom of soul and body—the longing for the freedom that wild things have, to range the open unhindered; the determination to learn the meaning of liberty of mind in some soft sylvan fastness which the world had overlooked in its half-crazed crusade of destruction! . . . Does all this interest you?"

"Yes."

She looked up at him, smiled, and, balancing the gilded bow across her knees, went on thoughtfully:

"The world, whose life mission seems to consist in meddling with other people's privacy, held up its centipede arms in horror. Gossip started like fire in dry grass; reporters came poking impudent noses into my house and gardens; friends arrived in procession to remonstrate; busybodies even in-

duced my servants to follow me. But I stopped that. And now, what do you suppose happened?"

"What?" asked Gray, wincing.

"Why, a perfectly horrid old doctor came after me into these woods and pretended he had made me do all this sort of thing! As though it were not of my own mind and of my own free will! And so I became vexed, and I was rude enough to shoot some of my arrows at him——"

She broke into a bewitching ripple of laughter. "Oh," she said, "if you had only seen him run! I—I know it was horridly rude of me—unpardonable—but I was so—so indignant."

He was laughing, too; he tried not to, out of some instinct of loyalty to the unfortunate Manners, but the vision of Manners in head-long flight came suddenly before his eyes, and he leaned back against a beech tree and laughed and laughed till the woods rang with their gay duet.

"Oh," she said breathlessly, "you are perfectly delightful! You seem to understand—to be part of this free, unhampered, pagan life I am leading. I am so glad you came into

it. Don't mind what I said about these woods being mine; they are as free to you as to me. Indeed, I love to see you in that shaggy goatskin cloak and sandals, stretched out on the moss like a laughing, mocking faun. It was the one touch needed."

He laughed, then a shadow of perplexity gathered on his brow.

"One thing," he said: "I—I think it's jolly, good fun to live this way from time to time—far more fun than motoring or golfing or driving or polo—but—but I don't exactly see how you keep it up."

"Keep what up?" she asked, puzzled.

"The—ah—the whole business. H-how do you find anything to eat out here?"

She blushed. "I'll have to confess," she said, "that I've ordered my servants to leave the pantry window unlocked. And, in the moonlight, I go stealing down through the meadow when everybody is abed, and I climb into the pantry window and take everything I want." And, as he looked at her in blank amazement: "It's such fun," she pleaded. "I—I know it isn't very classical—a goddess climbing into a pantry window—but I tried so hard to live on berries and nuts and things,

and the berries were unsatisfactory when they were not green, and the nuts were last year's and moldy——"

"Your bow and arrow," he hinted severely.

"Why—why, you didn't think I could ever have the cruelty to *kill* anything, did you?" she asked.

"Don't you chase the deer?"

"Oh, yes, I run after the big, fat things, and shoot my blunt arrows at them, but I never hit them, and it wouldn't hurt them if I did."

He raised himself from the moss and sat erect, crosslegged, and she did the same, confronting him.

"How often do you do this sort of thing?" he asked.

"What sort of thing?"

"Behave like a goddess!"

"About twice or three times a month," she said frankly.

"And the remainder of the time?"

"Oh, I go about—teas, lawn parties, driving—the usual, my shepherd friend. And I don't mind it now; in fact, I rather like it for a change. But it is always delicious to get back into my white hunting dress, and throw

myself, wide armed, into the heart of the woods. . . . Tell me about your pictures! May I see them some day?"

"They are not very good pictures," he said.

Her red mouth grew sensitive and pitiful. "Don't people care for your work?"

"No, I think not."

"Well, *I* do!" she exclaimed. "I know I'll like your pictures. I am perfectly sure I will. And I'll tell everybody — *everybody* that they are good! And then they'll begin to sell——"

"They're beginning to sell now," he said, wincing. "A friend of mine bought thirty the other day, and some other friends of mine heard of it and they have ordered several; and that means a scramble by the public for anything I do. I—it isn't fear of poverty that worries me any longer; it's—it's——"

"What?" she asked, raising her gray eyes.

"Fear of—you!"

"Of *me*!" And her eyes were very sweet and friendly, and very wide with surprise.

"Listen," he said. "Is it true that here, in this woodland, you have found freedom of thought as well as of body?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Do you think I also might dare to rise above the petty artificiality of convention and feel my heart and soul enfranchised, here under the green trees of your forest?"

"Y-yes. Why not? You have been wise enough to come. Why should you feel fettered in thought, here beside me in the forest?"

"Because I came here—here—" He faltered; she looked at him steadily.

"I am listening," she said. "Are you afraid to speak freely to me?"

"Yes. But I am going to. It is this: I—I came here because you were here—because, for years, since you were a child, I have seen you every summer here. And from the first I never, never forgot you."

She spoke coolly, but with heightened color: "I knew you by sight. I knew also that you had heard I was here. You told me. But you didn't come to see me; you came, moved by the same desire for that simple, pagan happiness that inspired me to come. . . . Didn't you?"

"No."

"Y-you didn't come out of—of mere curi-

osity!" she stammered, the painful color staining her face and neck. "You didn't do *that*—did you?"

"No."

"W-well, then — well, then —" But her voice refused to obey her, and she sat there with beautiful eyes dilated, staring at him fascinated.

"Before I tell you once more and unmistakably why I came," he said gravely, "I must be absolutely honest with you concerning myself."

"Have you not been?"

"Partly. But I cannot endure that even the faintest shadow of evasion or deceit fall between us."

"No, it must not," she said calmly. "Tell me what there is to tell."

"This: that three months ago I was a commonplace, rather clever business man. My business was about the most degraded of any you ever heard of——"

"I won't believe it!" she said, paling a trifle.

"You must. I—I—my business consisted in defacing city, suburb, and country with signs——"

"Oh!" she breathed, "don't—don't tell me—" She stretched out both white arms as though to thrust away the dreadful knowledge; but he set his jaw and went on grimly:

"That was what I did; that is what I was. I abhor it; I look back on that life with a shudder. But, if I am to tell you what I have come into these woods to tell you, I must go on. . . . Shall I go on?"

The distress in her eyes almost unnerved him for the confession he must make; he could scarcely endure to paint himself in such somber and hideous colors for her to see him as he was.

"Shall I go on?" he asked with an effort. "I came here to tell you something—but I must first make clean confession if I am to say anything else. Shall I go on . . . Diana?"

"Y-yes," she breathed in a scarcely audible voice.

"Then listen. A man I knew, a friend, endowed with strange and capable powers of mental suggestion, seeing the sort of thing I was, took it upon himself to treat me for all those qualities I lacked."

"Yes," she whispered, "yes. Oh, go on! Please go on!"

"That is all," he said slowly. "He did treat me, although I was not aware of it at the time. I began to loathe my business; I began to live only for art. My business went to smash; I couldn't sell my pictures. Now I see that I am to sell them; I see ahead of me success, affluence, happiness."

"Yes," she whispered, "I see it, too."

"It is for you to prophesy," he said, looking at her; "for you alone can decide."

"I? Decide——"

"Whether happiness is to be added to success and affluence."

"How—how could I decide?" She looked suddenly straight into his eyes, then sprang to her feet and walked to the brook's edge. And after a long while she seated herself on a moss-grown boulder, her elbow on her knee, soft, round chin cupped in her palm, staring absently across the stream.

He stood erect, watching his absent-minded goddess, his heart beating like a hammer. A wild idea that recourse to his life might help matters was dismissed as hopeless, because all he could play was "Rally Around the Flag,"

and a mellifluously minor love song was what this crisis required.

"Diana!"

"Yes?" she responded absently.

"May—do you mind if I come over where you are?"

"N-no."

He walked across the moss and pebbled shore, and stood beside her, looking down at her.

"Diana?"

She raised her eyes without apparent interest.

"Do you despise me for what I once was?" he asked, his voice not under good control.

"No," she said indifferently.

"Then—then—as long as I have confessed, may I go on?"

"Was there more to say?" she asked coldly.

"Yes."

"To *me*?"

"Yes."

"Why to *me*?"

"Because I—" Her sudden pallor checked him. She rose abruptly, stared around her

like a person suddenly and unpleasantly awakened, then, without looking at him, she walked swiftly away into the forest, head lowered, the gilded bow swinging from one small hand.

And Gray hurried back to where he had hidden his valise, seized it, and started after her. But to his despair she had disappeared amid the trees—gone, vanished utterly; and, valise in hand, he began running distractedly about, and finally called to her in a low voice, then louder and persistently, his voice unsteady with the terror of losing her.

To and fro among the trees he hurried, up hillocks, down into moist, fragrant glades full of the late red sunshine of departing day, hastening blindly forward, yet, like those lost in forests, unconsciously drawn into the inevitable circle.

The sun had gone out in the woods; here and there a high-crested pine glowed ruddy against the sky; but soon the last rays faded from the top branches of the tallest forest giant, and the purple transparent evening light fell over the world like a spell.

He had been lost for some time, and he knew it. And at last, just on the edge of

evening, he came out in a tiny clearing where the brook ran through; and he saw her leaning there against a silver beech tree, looking silently at him.

He halted, scarcely believing his eyes; she neither spoke nor stirred, and after a moment he started toward her, calling her by name. But she made no reply.

He came up and stood before her; she did not move, nor did she answer when he spoke again; only her beautiful gray eyes watched him under the dark-fringed lids; only the rose color came tinting her face, faint as the afterglow above them in the sky.

"I had only one more thing to say," he stammered, "when you left me—so suddenly. I've looked for you such a long time—everywhere——"

"I saw you," she said.

"You saw me—all the while? You heard me call you?"

"Yes. Why should I answer your call? Why should I follow you?"

"Not—not if you do not desire to," he said slowly.

"One may answer without speaking," she

said unsteadily. "I am here. Is that n-not my answer?"

And as he stood silent:

"Do you suppose you could ever have found me if I had not—not permitted it?"

He bent forward, striving to read her face in the dusk; her eyelids trembled slightly.

"Diana!"

"Yes," she whispered; and, as he faltered, tongue-tied and abashed:

"Time is rushing like the wind through legends," she murmured. "Can you stop it—can you do anything for—for us? This is all wrong—all wrong—like the loves of the old-time gods—sweeping you and me together. . . . Let me cling to my tree while it lasts—while the whirl of the vision lasts——"

"Diana—my darling!"

"I *could* have escaped," she whispered; "but—but I followed——"

"Diana!"

"A goddess seldom follows a man. But—b-but when she does——"

He bent swiftly and caught her hands in his; but she freed them and clung desperately to her tree.

"But when she *does*," she breathed un-

steadily, "it is because she—she can't—help—it."

"Diana, Diana!" he whispered; "I have loved you so many years—so many years——"

"And I you—years and years in a single hour—pagan—shameless pagan that I am! Oh, you don't know—you don't know—but I know I was made for this—fashioned for this swift wooing—this woodland embrace—here—breathless in your arms—my own symbol, the moon, above us. . . . This moment cannot last—this twilight madness—in your arms. Dearest, release me! Have I not told you I loved you? Have I not—oh-h!—not my lips—not yet!"

But he had his way, until at last it became her way also; and the moon watched them, silvering their bodies with her living celestial beauty.

"In a week," he insisted.

"A—a month," she pleaded tremulously.

"I am dazed."

Arm encircling her slim waist, he halted on the hill's grassy crest.

"No, not even a week," he said. "Tomorrow! Will you?"

"Dear!"

"To-morrow. *Will* you?"

"Y-yes," she sighed adorably. "I wish it, too. Oh, why—why must you go?"

"I—I'm not accustomed to this—ah—costume"—looking down at his pink tights. "Fact is, my darling, that I'm a trifle cold——"

"Oh," she cried, in alarm, "put on your hat at once!"

"It's a horribly inartistic combination—derby hat with what I'm wearing," he protested.

"Put it on!" she insisted; and he did. She must have been very deeply in love to have endured the *ensemble*.

For a while they lingered there in the moonlight, looking off over the valley. Her house stood down there among the trees; they could see one dimly lighted window.

"The pantry," she said softly. "Shall we climb in?"

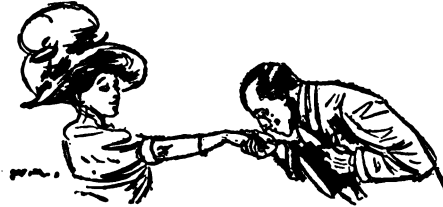
"Do you think——"

"Certainly!" she cried, enchanted. "It will be the most delicious supper in the world! Take hold of my hand, quick! Are you ready?"

"Ready," he said.

And away they raced together down the hill, he in his pink silk tights, clutching his suitcase, the derby hat crammed firmly over his ears.

And in this fashion was the flight of Stephen Gray and his absent-minded goddess into the divine splendors of Olympus.



CHAPTER VII

A LADY IN HASTE



O you mean to say that you actually effected this radical transformation in me through mental persuasion?" asked Kelly Jones, with misleading mildness.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed in Manners's room at the Lenox Club, his straw hat on the back of his head, his walking stick balanced vertically between flattened palms. From time to time he spun it on its ferrule.

Manners screwed his monocle into his left eye and smiled benignly upon Jones. The monocle fell out; he replaced it and waved his hand as though modestly disclaiming credit for the regeneration of Jones.

"Dear friend," he said in a deprecating voice, "while perhaps a vainer man than I might claim, with reason, some little credit for this happy and — ah — unexpected moral development in your character——"

"So you *did* do it," mused Jones very calmly. "Gray and Kelvin and Todd noticed how I was acting at a house party the other day; and they all seemed to think it was their duty to inform me that you are responsible for the sort of citizen I've turned into during the last three months."

"It's very kind of them," replied Manners, with a modest cough. "I—ah—was fortunate enough to be of some slight service to these gentlemen—using on them the science of mental persuasion which I have also employed with such happy effect upon you——"

"Oh! So you *did* deliberately employ mental influence on me? They said you did. I couldn't believe it."

Manners beamed with pride and affection on the cool but now slightly trembling Jones.

"I did, dear friend; yet I shrink from claiming the entire credit, because, at first, I had no real belief in my power and ability to influence and alter other people's characters and natures for the better. It was merely out of curiosity—just to see whether anything could possibly be done to make you less objectionable than you were—that I concentrated my mind on what at that time served you for an intellect. And I gave you the most powerful mental treatment I was capable of giving. And then, slowly, gradually, but perceptibly——"

"What happened?" asked Jones, in a voice audibly unsteady.

"Why, you began to behave so strangely—so—so decently——"

"Oh, I did, did I?"—his voice ending in a partly developed snarl. "Well, what sort of a creature do you think you've turned me into—you infernal and outrageous meddler? What, in the name of ten thousand idiots, did you want to interfere for? And I don't know now whether to let you live any longer or not, or whether to give you a chance of un-

doing what you've done to me. Personally, I prefer to destroy you!"

Stiffened to a human gargoyle in his amazement and grief, Manners gazed at his victim with protruding eyes.

"D-don't you *l-like* what I've t-turned you into?" he gasped at last.

Jones merely barked at him.

"B-b-but you were such an offensive little snob!" stammered Manners. "Why, Jones, don't you remember what an arrogant, inflated ass you were? A narrow-minded nin-compoop!—a conceited worshiper of caste and fashion, toddling about town from function to function, lisping small talk, making love to millions, and leading inane cotillions? Can you blame me for trying to inject into you a vigorous dose of manly democracy—an unslaked passion for social equality and human brotherhood?"

"I may have been everything you say," retorted Jones, turning livid to the ears, "but it was none of your business, William. Do you know what you've turned me into? Do you realize what I'm doing now? I'm drifting headlong upon the rocks of moral and social disaster! I'm driving toward social ex-

tremes which appall even my own servants! I'm misbehaving most horridly, William! I was put out of Tuxedo."

"W-why?" faltered Manners.

"For wafting kisses at my hostess's French maid!" snapped Jones. "And no sooner did I find myself in town again than I seized the opportunity to issue invitations for a big dinner to introduce our second parlor maid to society. Nobody came, and I understand everybody in town, including the parlor maid, thinks I'm going crazy. That's what you've done for me with your social equality and universal brotherhood!"

Manners sat stunned, staring at Jones, who glared back, nervously clinching and unclenching his hand.

"Then," continued Jones, "although I seemed to realize it was not usual, I invited our colored furnaceman, the local policeman, and some very honest and efficient members of the municipal street-cleaning service to meet our butler and the housemaids socially at a pink tea. Fortunately, my parents are at Bar Harbor—for it was a dreadful scene, William—they drew the color line at the furnaceman, violently, and many things were

broken in the drawing-rooms. And now what I am afraid of is that, in a moment of socialistic enthusiasm, I might inadvertently lead our estimable and cleanly cook to the altar, unless you do something at once to check my mania for social equality."

"Your *cook*!" shouted Manners, leaping to his feet.

"Yes," said Jones firmly. "She is very honest and clean and sober, and she makes wonderful *entrées*——"

"Jones. You *are* crazy!"

"Maybe I am," retorted Jones wrathfully, "but you made me. Now, what I want to know is, whether you're going to do something for me before I satisfy my raging social appetite for a permanent life below stairs? I tell you, I'm perfectly possessed to marry my own cook or somebody else's. Confound it, William, I'll do it this very afternoon if you don't look out! I'm liable to do it at any moment, I tell you——"

"N-now?" stammered Manners aghast—"Now? You don't mean *now*, do you, Kelly; you wouldn't approach your cook with s-s-such intentions to-day, would you, Jonesey, old friend?"

"Ya-as, I would," growled Jones. "Do you know what I've been doing this morning? Well, I've been washing off our sidewalk and exchanging sociable banter with my neighbors' scullions. I invited a trolley gripman to lunch with me at the Stuyvesant Club, but he couldn't leave his Broadway car; I wrote my sister's friend, Mrs. Magnelius Grandcourt, asking her to propose our laundress for the woman's new Commonwealth Club."

"Jones!!!"

"What?"

"W-wait a moment; wait until I can g-get between you and the door," said Manners soothingly, edging around his friend.

Jones swung about in his chair.

"Are you going to lock me in?" he asked. "You'd better not, because I want to go home and see how the cook is getting on. I've arranged to have her take piano lessons. She didn't seem to want to, but I engaged a teacher for three o'clock."

Manners's teeth were chattering in terror as he backed toward the door. "Th-that's all right, Jones," he managed to say. "I'll fix it up for you—I'll g-go out and fix it some

way or other. Only you stay here, Jones—won't you? Listen, Jones; you wouldn't sneak out as soon as I'm gone and make straight for that c-cook and m-m-marry her—would you, Jonesey?"

"I don't know," said Jones gloomily. "I know I ought not to, but I'm likely to do almost anything in the culinary line. I tell you, I've got a perfect mania for an alliance below stairs, the farthest downstairs the better!"

"W-well, you wait. If you feel that way—if you've g-got to m-m-marry somebody within the next few hours, I'll try to do something suitable for you——"

"What are you going to do? I refuse to marry any suitable girl. How are you going to arrange that for me?"

"I don't know; just give me a—a moment to think it out."

"Well, hurry, then," said Jones. "That cook makes good *entrées*, and I'd be perfectly willing to marry her and pass my examinations for policeman."

"Will you wait here for me until I come back?" pleaded Manners, mopping the starting perspiration from his cold brow.

"Yes—if you think you can do anything for me. I'll give you half an hour, and not another minute——"

"You promise, Jones? Will you give me an hour?—two—I mean three hours? Will you?"

"Yes—yes," with reluctance; "but not another second. I want to go back to the cook. I tell you that cook is a perfectly good cook—and I don't mind being a policeman for her sake——"

Manners slammed the door, sped to the cloak room, seized hat, gloves, and walking stick, and ran out into the sunny streets of the metropolis, his head in a whirl.

His first intention had been to rush distractedly to some physician, confess the perilous situation of Jones, and frantically beg medical assistance to wean Jones from his obsession with a strait-jacket.

Then it occurred to him that his own sanity would instantly be under suspicion, and that, if they detained him indefinitely for medical examination, Jones would consider himself free to continue his headlong progress kitchenward. And he had but three hours before him.

What in the world could he do? He stopped short in full career up Fifth Avenue, and stared vacantly about. *What* was there to do? Time was beating it around the world; every double tick of his watch seemed to repeat the warning: "Quick—quick! Quick—quick!" Even the minute-hand pointed to twenty-three; and, in the distant siren of a motor car, he seemed to hear the ominous wail, Skidoo—oo—oo!

Whatever he was to accomplish must be executed with dispatch. He had only three hours!—three hours between Jones and a declaration to the cook! And in his excitement he began galloping uptown as though driven by Furies.

It is said by some that the motion of the legs incites thought, although the brain is not always in the feet. And, as Manners ran, a grotesquely forlorn idea took shape—that some amiable and attractive girl of his acquaintance, if all the deadly and imminent facts of Jones's peril were laid before her, might, out of a noble impulse of pity, consent to inspect Jones with a view to matrimony. For what Jones required was a lady in haste.

But everybody feminine and possible was

out of town; he drove madly in a hansom from house to house, only to be confronted with boarded doors and windows and lowered shades displaying the round, particolored disk of a burglar-insurance company.

For an hour he scoured the districts where some stray girl of his acquaintance might still chance to linger in town. It was useless; Fashion had fled the city long since—to return to a hotel for a day, perhaps, in transit from one watering place to another—from seaside to mountain, and *vice versa*—but not to reopen the big, closed houses in the residential district.

And now, as he sat in his cab, baffled, beaten, desperate, he looked longingly at the pretty women passing, doubtless in town for a day's shopping. And, hoping that among them might appear some woman he knew, he sat for another hour, his cab drawn up along the curb, anxiously scanning the passers-by.

If Jones had only given him three days instead of three hours he might have advertised in the papers: "Wanted! a lady in haste!" and stood a fair chance of capturing something available for Jones in a town where anything can be had by advertising.

"If somebody I know doesn't appear pretty soon," he muttered excitedly to himself, "I've a notion to pick out the prettiest girl I can find and tell her the whole harrowing situation, and beg her to take a look at Jones, object matrimony. . . . The most she could do would be to call a policeman; but Heaven knows my intentions! Heaven knows them to be pure as an unborn kitten's—"

"The thing to do," he said, as the suggestion grew and took hold of him more firmly—"The thing to do, at any cost, is to save Jones from that cook! He mustn't wed her! I—I won't let him—I can't!"

Dark thoughts swarmed about him; dreadful dreams, unbidden, came crowding upon him.

"No—no!" he muttered, appalled; "I cannot do *that*, even for Jones. I cannot marry her to save my friend! There must be some way—there must remain some other solution of this hideous problem!"

He leaned from his hansom, staring stonily out at the passers-by.

"If only I could see a human girl who looks as though she wouldn't call a policeman! If only in this passing throng, so self-

ishly absorbed in its own petty concerns, I could see one kind, mild, noble face — one lofty countenance capable of understanding, of pity, of sublimely generous impulse —” His muttering ceased abruptly, his astonished eyes became fixed; then the bright flush of shame mantled his features.

A young girl in a dainty black summer walking gown was advancing leisurely along the avenue, glancing severely and fearlessly about her out of a pair of unusually intelligent eyes. Under one arm she carried a packet.

“By Jove!” muttered Manners; “another of my experiments!”

For instantly he had recognized in that graceful, slender figure and pretty, absorbed face another of his subjects—one of the five unknown and attractive girls whom he had observed from the Lenox Club window that fatal afternoon three months or more ago, and on whom, in his idle perversity, he had experimented — treating each mentally, for whatever, in his presumptuous opinion, each seemed to lack in character.

As soon as he recognized her he remembered what he had treated her for. He had

projected toward her an emergency dose of unworldly generosity to correct the sensuously selfish modeling of the chin, and the cold, thin, calculating expression of the lips. "What you need," he had suggested vindictively, "is to learn to do your own housework and cooking! Think less about yourself; give up your horses and use the feet Heaven gave you! Let your greatest luxury be the yielding to generous impulse! Go and revel in emotions, and smile and sigh with the great out-world!"

And everything that he had willed for her came back to him now—the scene itself, that fresh, sunny April afternoon, himself at the club window, and she, pale, indifferent, overdressed, glancing out upon the young world so disdainfully from the comfortable cushions of her smartly appointed carriage.

And now here she was, afoot this time, sauntering democratically up Fifth Avenue in midsummer, her beautiful dark eyes looking out on the dusty world, and with a new and pensive intelligence. And Manners noticed that her chin and the thin, coldly selfish lips had now grown full and sensitive and delicately rounded.

As she passed she glanced up at Manners, considered him for a second, then her gaze quietly shifted elsewhere, and she passed on her way along the sunny avenue, composed, unconscious that behind her an excited individual, wearing a monocle, was hurriedly settling obligations with his cabman, determined to pursue her and persuade her to overlook informality and listen to the strangest story that a young girl had ever dreamed of in the metropolis of Manhattan.

As he hastened after her he drew out his watch and glanced at it. He had half an hour—twenty minutes to persuade her; ten minutes to get back to Jones!

For a moment his courage failed in full realization of the almost hopeless situation. But the very shock of it seemed to nerve him to desperation; the girl was walking just ahead of him, and he took two quick strides forward and removed his hat with terror written on every feature.

“D-don’t run!” he said hoarsely; “there’s no danger!”

So alarming was the countenance she turned to look into that she involuntarily halted, alert and startled.

"D-don't stop, for Heaven's sake!" stammered Manners, replacing his hat. "Keep straight on, please! I only want a lady in haste——"

"What is the matter?" she murmured, paling a trifle, but hastily moving forward again. "Is anything dreadful behind me?"

"No, only I. Don't call a policeman—don't cross the street to avoid me. I—I don't mean to be offensive, but I've simply got to tell you something——"

She halted instinctively, a wave of astonished displeasure crimsoning her pretty face.

"Oh!" he cried in an agonized voice; "don't do that! Don't look at me as though you thought me impertinent."

"You *are*!" she said under her breath, moving swiftly forward to avoid him at the same time.

"N-no, I'm not! Look at me! Do I look impertinent? I only look half scared out of my senses, don't I?" he pleaded, keeping step with her. "Can't you tell when a man is in desperate need of help?"

She slackened her pace; her flushed and averted face slowly turned part way toward him.

"Are you asking for *charity*?" she demanded incredulously.

"N-not *that* sort of help," he explained, as her hand mechanically sought her purse, while the dark, disdainful eyes looked him steadily in the face.

"*What* is it you wish?" she insisted impatiently.

"A lady—just a plain, ordinary lady—and—and a few moments' conversation with you. *Don't* mistake me! Don't condemn me the way you—you are doing! I—I'm in a perfectly ghastly predicament, and I need help."

"What?"

"A predicament. Please, *please* believe that only sheerest desperation drove me to this unconventional step. I'm a perfectly decent man—if there was time I'd ask you to look me up in the Blue Book and Social Register—but there isn't. I—I've only half an hour to make my appeal to you and get back to Jones before he succumbs to his cook——"

"Jones!" she repeated, astonished; "his *cook*!"

"Y-yes. He's the man who is in this terrible predicament——"

"You *said* that *you* were!"

"So I am—not as badly in as Jones! Oh, help us—help us, please——"

"Who is Jones?" she asked, utterly perplexed.

"K-K-Kelly Jones—a f-friend of mine. P-perhaps you know him!"

"Did you say *Kelly* Jones?"

"Yes. He's in the Blue Book, too, but he won't be very long unless you do something about it!"

"I?" she repeated, helplessly bewildered. Then a sudden glimmer of fear grew in her dark eyes. Manners saw it growing. He had expected it.

"You think I'm biting crazy?" he said sadly; "don't you?"

She flushed painfully, but the strange little glimmer died out.

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking at him in impatient perplexity. "If you really believe that anything justifies your speaking to me in this manner, please explain it as briefly as possible. You spoke just now in behalf of a Mr. Jones—Kelly Jones. What has happened to this Mr. Jones?"

"Do you know him?" asked Manners eagerly. "He's in most hor-r-r-rible danger!"

You alone can aid him! Do you know him?"

"You say he is in danger?" she asked with a little quaver in her voice.

"Ter-r-r-rible!" he insisted anxiously. "Do you know him?"

"I was once at boarding school with a sister of a Mr. Kelly Jones—Kelly De Lancey Jones—and I believe he came down to Ferndale once or twice. He probably wouldn't remember *me*—" She broke off, surprised at the evident delight breaking out on Manners's face—innocent, guileless delight; and even she recognized the naïve harmlessness of the joy now illuminating the features of Mr. Manners until they fairly exuded a sort of unctuous benevolence.

"The gods," he said brokenly, "are occasionally good to the Irish. My grandfather came from Roscommon, and my name is William Manners."

"Are *you* that amazing man!" she exclaimed in dismay, shrinking back a pace. "Are you the—the Mr. Manners—the one who—who changes people into——"

"Which victim of mine do you know?" he asked calmly. "Kelvin? Gray? Todd?"

"Mrs. Todd," she admitted, her beautiful dark eyes reflecting her astonishment and curiosity.

"Oh!" he said bitterly. "So you know what I was idiot enough to do to the Todds? Well, what I did to the Todds and Grays and Kelvins isn't a circumstance to what I've managed to do to Kelly Jones and y—" He bit the pronoun off short on the very instant of self-betrayal.

"W-what have you done?" she breathed excitedly, "and why do you speak so bitterly about it? It—it is certainly a terrible and fearful power you have—and yet—and yet you have made Mr. and Mrs. Todd very, very happy."

"That may be," he muttered; "but you don't know what *I've* been through. By Jove! When I think of the agony I've endured! And now I'm distracted over Kelly Jones——"

"Is—is Mr. Jones—*what* did you do to Mr. Jones?" she ventured.

"I injected a lot of imbecile ideas into him! I dosed him full of democracy! I figuratively turned a mental hose on him and soaked him all over with the milk of human brother-

hood! He was a snob, and I hurled waves of social equality at him! What an ass I was!" And Manners fairly writhed as he walked.

"But—but was not that rather helpful to Mr. Jones?" she asked, intensely interested.

"Helpful! Do you know what he's trying to accomplish?"

"W-what?"

"Marriage! With his family cook!"

"Oh-h!" she said faintly. "Why?"

"Because I didn't know how to work those waves," groaned Manners; "and because I don't know how to stop 'em! Now he's so full of social democracy that he wants to be a policeman!"

"Mr. Manners!!"

"He does! That's why, driven to despair, I dared risk speaking to you."

"But," she said, confused, "I don't yet understand——"

"Shall I tell you the startling truth?—but I've simply got to tell you, anyway; and all I ask you to promise, in the beginning, is not to run away."

"I certainly shall not *run* in any direction," she said, with heightened color.

"W-well, don't make *me* run. Will you promise?"

She continued walking in self-possessed silence for a minute or two. Presently she glanced up at him as though awaiting further enlightenment.

"As a matter of indisputable fact," began Manners solemnly, "Kelly Jones is at this moment in my room at the Lenox Club, determined to return to his house and make the family cook his bride."

The girl shuddered, but kept her eyes on Manners.

"Three hours," he continued, "were allowed me to find some remedy, some alternative, to his expressed determination. Two and three quarters of those fatal hours are now over. Poor Jones! Poor, unfortunate Jones!—in the clutches of a mania which is no fault of his; mad on the subject of assorted scullions; his judgment befuddled with the complexities of social democracy; driving headlong upon the rocks of social extinction——"

"Oh-h!" breathed the girl pitifully; "you *must* do something!"

"Think of it!" insisted Manners; "think

of this handsome but wretched young man driven helplessly kitchenward in spite of himself! a most attractive, intellectual, ornamental young man——”

“This is actually w-wicked, Mr. Manners!” said the girl hotly. “This is the most shameful——”

“It certainly is!” said Manners miserably. “I’m at my wits’ end to know what to do. That’s why I ventured to speak to you. And,” he added solemnly, “so long as I have spoken to you nothing now remains between that unfortunate young man and the soup—to speak metaphorically—except *you!*”

“I? What do you mean, Mr. Manners?”

The hot color crept into her cheeks again. “Why do you come to me? What do you expect I could do in this very cruel and shocking matter?”

“I expect you’d tell me how to get Jones out of it.”

“*I?*” she repeated—“I? How can I mitigate this perfectly dreadful thing you have done to him——”

“It’s not half so dreadful a thing as what he’ll do in about ten more minutes,” said

Manners, dejectedly inspecting his watch, "unless you prevent it."

"What is he going to do in about t-ten more minutes?" asked the girl tremulously.

"I told you," he replied, "that he has honorable designs on the family cook."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, revolted; "you have *got* to do something! You *must*!"

"What?" he asked vacantly.

"Get rid of that cook!" she said with spirit. "Why not? You must get rid of her instantly and forever!"

"I? How am I to get rid of her?" he asked aghast. "M-m-murder her—do you mean? And h-hide her m-m-mortal remains in the t-t-tubs——"

"Don't talk that way," said the girl nervously; "even in jest. There must be some way—some other way of getting rid of her——"

"What way? We've got about nine minutes left."

The girl halted, standing stock-still. Then, looking up:

"Where does Mr. Jones live?"

"In Fifty-eighth Street—the next block."

"You know the house, of course?"

Manners admitted that he did.

"Then," she said with determination, "it will be easy enough to get rid of that cook. All that is necessary is for you to go there, ask what wages she's getting, offer her double to leave the house in eight minutes, and take her away with you——"

"But what am I to do with a cook?" asked Manners.

"Why, take her into your own service, of course——"

"How can I when I live at the club?"

"You must take her, anyway!" said the girl warmly. "It doesn't make any particular difference to me what you do with her. The main thing is to get her out of Mr. Jones's house before he can——"

"Yes, I know. But what would I be doing with a female cook? I couldn't put her up at the club, you know. I—you don't expect me to pass my entire time in walking about the streets with a cook, do you?"

"Mr. Manners! You *must* get that cook out of Mr. Jones's house this instant! It's wicked and shameful and outrageously selfish of you to leave her there another moment!"

"Great Heaven!" said Manners; "do you

expect me to adopt her? How can I pay her double wages when I haven't any kitchen for her? If I take that unfortunate woman out of the house there's apparently nothing left for me to do but start on a wedding tour with her!"

"What a horridly selfish man you are!" she said.

Manners breathed harder.

"Oh!" she exclaimed impatiently; "are you going to stand there when every moment is perilous? Are you going to do nothing? Are you afraid?" And, flushing with a generous impulse of pity, she said: "Show me that house! I cannot stand by and let such a thing happen to anybody!"

Manners started forward with alacrity. "That's the very thing," he said. "A woman understands how to manage cooks and things. Here's the house. I—I'd better not go in, I think——"

"You must!" she said.

He stood at the door, hesitating, but she leaned forward and touched the electric button.

"Anyway, all the servants have left," he muttered.

"Why?" she asked blankly.

"Because Jones gave a pink tea yesterday, and invited the colored furnaceman, and they drew the color line with violence."

"Then—then is there nobody to let us in?" she asked, appalled.

"Only the cook—" He stopped short as the door was opened. Then he attempted to back away, but the girl, reckless of appearances laid her hand on his arm so that he was practically forced to enter the house with her and confront a mature Hibernian of female persuasion, who returned their scrutiny out of two small, greenish and strabismic eyes.

"Are you the cook?" asked the girl calmly.

"I am *that*!" replied the woman emphatically.

The girl turned and bade Manners remain where he was in a voice of such remarkable decision that he stood a moment transfixed; then, as the girl and the cook disappeared into the drawing-room, he feebly protruded one arm to sustain himself, found nothing to support him, and collapsed upon a gilded hall seat, his hat on his knees.

For exactly two minutes the girl and the

cook remained invisible; then the cook appeared, laboriously waddling toward the servants' stairway in the rear, and, in an incredibly short space of time, reappeared enveloped in an imitation India shawl, carrying a bag in one fist and vigorously pushing her prehistoric bonnet straight with the other.

At the same moment the girl walked swiftly into the hallway and threw open the front door.

"This is the gentleman, Maggie," said the girl cruelly. "He will, I hope, be very, very kind to you, and very generous. Perhaps he may continue to raise your wages from month to month. . . . Are you ready, Mr. Manners?"

Manners, dazed, stood up and gazed fearfully upon the cook. As in a horrid sort of dream he slowly realized that the cook was not sober. Then he heard the girl behind him saying: "Hurry, Mr. Manners; you are already a little late." Then he found himself on the sidewalk, the Irish nightmare waddling at his elbow, and he halted, casting back one wild glance at the open door behind him.

From the doorstep the girl was looking at him, and in his exasperated eyes she detected

the nascent frenzy. With a sudden nervous movement she forestalled the bolt for freedom, shut the door, and sank down on the hall seat, almost hysterical with laughter.

And through the diamond sidelights she saw Mr. Manners wandering down the street as though stupefied, and at his elbow a complacently befuddled cook, steadying her steps with great dignity beside his, and continually attempting to straighten the bonnet, which had a tendency to slip down over her right eye.



CHAPTER VIII

ABSENT TREATMENT



FOR a minute or two the young girl behind the door watched the amazing progress of Manners and his cook, giving them a full three minutes to disappear into the jungles of Sixth Avenue; then, weak with laughter, she rose and laid her hand on the door, ready to make her own escape.

At the same instant a man's shadowy figure darkened the glass from the outside, and she heard the impatient fumbling of a latchkey in the lock.

"Jones!" she whispered with whitening lips. "What on earth am I to do?"

Glancing right and left in pallid desperation she shrank back; and as the heavy glass and wrought-iron door began to open, she turned and fairly took to her heels, running swiftly, blindly, yet with some occult instinct, too, for in a moment more she found herself in the laundry.

The same instinct also, perhaps, set her rapidly unpinning her hat and tucking it and her gloves and purse away in the depths of an ironing table.

Fortunately she was dressed in black. Freshly laundered caps and aprons lay in a clothes basket near by—relics, no doubt, of the departed maids. She heard a step on the kitchen stairs, seized a cap and pinned it on her dark hair, threw on a ruffled apron, and, frightened almost to death, turned to confront him.

"Maggie," began Jones, walking slowly from the kitchen toward the laundry, "this is a very solemn moment in your life and in mine. Kind hearts are more than coronets, Maggie, and beauty is but skin deep. All human beings are born free and equal, and

your present condition of servitude, Maggie, is an outrageous anachronism. Tyrannical society and the despotism of wealth, embodied in me, Maggie, have come into your humble kitchen to offer you reparation——”

He stopped suddenly as he arrived at the laundry door and blinked in mild surprise.

“Where’s Maggie?” he asked, inspecting the strange, youthful figure in cap and apron, backed up fearfully against the tubs.

“M-Maggie, the cook?” she asked faintly. “I think she went away.”

“What?”

“Y-yes; with a gentleman.”

“What gentleman?”

“The—the one who brought me here—Mr. Manners.”

“Manners! Manners!” exclaimed Jones. “You tell me that William Manners has been here and gone off with my cook?”

“Y-yes.”

Profoundly astonished, Jones sat down on the clothes basket.

“Do you mean to tell me that he’s actually taken her away?” he murmured.

“Yes—for good.”

Jones drew a long, deep breath of relief.

"It was high time," he said, with a shudder. "I've had a narrow escape! She was not—not physically very attractive. I am glad *you* are."

"W-what?"

"I am glad that you are physically attractive, because it will be easier for me to offer you marriage. You see, I'm determined to marry somebody's cook, and it might as well be my own. Have you any town references?"

"N-no," she gasped.

"That makes no difference," he said kindly. "Perhaps you've just come off the Island, but I don't mind. You see, my creed is the simple creed of brotherly love and equality. The artificial social codes and laws which put you behind the bars——"

"But I *haven't* been in prison!" she said hysterically.

"It's all the same to me," observed Jones mildly. "Sin should be its own punishment. Retaliation is barbarous. I remembered that when I wanted to assault **Manners** this afternoon."

He shuddered again and looked up into the fresh, pretty face of the girl by the window.

"I'm glad Maggie has gone," he said, "because I should not have avoided my duty had she remained. And now the decision remains with you."

"What decision?"

"About marrying me. Will you?"

"Mr. Jones! Would you actually marry a—a cook?"

Jones did not answer immediately. He sat on the edge of the clothes hamper, a curious expression on his face. Suddenly a ghastly pallor whitened it; he rose unsteadily to his feet.

"It's odd," he muttered; "something seems to be happening to me all over!"—And he began to move blindly toward the door, swaying as he progressed.

Dismayed, the girl looked after him; then, as he began to stumble up the stairway, she followed swiftly, saw him almost fall twice, recover, and start dizzily toward the drawing-room.

"Are you very ill?" she asked, stepping up beside him.

"No—something rather agreeable than otherwise seems to be happening to me." He reeled, and she caught him.

"Thank you; if I could reach a—a sofa——"

"Courage!" she said, resolutely controlling her own dismay, and supporting him to the nearest lounge, where he sank down on the brocaded cushions, limp, astonished at his own condition, but curiously contented.

"Something is surely happening to me," he repeated. "I believe—I believe that Manners is giving me some more absent treatment—powerful, concentrated, emergency treatment—in relation to you."

"To *me*!" she repeated, startled.

"Yes—yes, I am sure of it now! . . . How b-b-beautiful you are!" he sighed sentimentally. "How exquisitely attractive is that cap and apron! And your divinely dark eyes, and your lovely mouth, and——"

"Mr. Jones!"

"I can't help it; he's making me adore you!"

"What!" she cried, exasperated.

The telephone upstairs began to ring violently.

"Would you mind answering?" he asked appealingly. "I'm still rather dizzy."

She straightened up, turned, and mounted

the stairs with wrath in her eyes. The next moment the whirl of the telephone bell ceased; Jones heard her voice, scornfully level and even in tone, then silence, then a startled exclamation. And now her voice became animated, expostulatory, indignant, pleading by turns:

"Mr. Manners! I refuse to understand you."

"Of course, I hope you will be able to shift Mr. Jones's affections to a worthier——"

"You say that you are now giving Mr. Jones this new treatment?"

"Yes; Mr. Jones is apparently already affected by *something*!"

"Yes, you certainly have proved that you are able to give absent mental treatment."

"What!!!"

"Mr. Manners, that is the most outrageously impudent threat——"

“What!!! To revenge yourself for what you suffered with that cook! It certainly was not my fault——”

“Yes, I *did* laugh, but I couldn’t help it.”

“Mr. Manners! You simply dare not attempt such a thing on Mr. Jones and me, even if you did promise him a lady in haste.”

“I can’t help it; I am very sorry for Mr. Jones, but I certainly do not wish to learn to care for him——”

“Make *me* love Mr. Jones!!!”

“What! You say you are making me fall in love with Mr. Jones? *Now?* Mr. Manners, you exasperate me! You are the wickedest mischief-maker in the world—or would be if you could be! But I defy you to force me to do any——”

“You’re making *him* care for *me?*”

“I don’t believe it! You can’t do it! H-Heaven won’t allow you to do such things

to Kelly! Oh-h!—You’ve made me call him Kelly already! You—you are frightening me, Mr. Manners! I—I admit that you can do these terrible things—I confess your awful power! But don’t, Mr. Manners, please, please don’t m-make me care for him!”

“Oh, you *are*! You are making me care for him *now*! Care more for him every second! You are *making* me care for him most excessively!”

“*No!!* I—I don’t want you to stop—now! I—It’s too late; you’ve made me b-b-begin to love him!”

“Yes, I *do* love him! I don’t care what you do to us now, because I am perfectly mad about him.”

“Yes, I do forgive you. I am too happy not to. I—It certainly was perfectly dear of you to make me so celestially happy. . . . And he’s downstairs. And I can’t endure this separation from him another instant! So. good-by——”

"Yes, it is heavenly to be so thoroughly in love! Good-by——"

"Oh, what?"

"I don't care what anybody says!"

"Yes. I am willing to be his lady in haste."

"All right, if you think we ought to have a clergyman this afternoon."

"Oh, *thank* you! Bring any clergyman convenient. I'll tell Kelly how kind you are. Good-by!"

And then she rang off, flushed, radiant, wonder-eyed in the dazzling beauty of a world transformed miraculously into Paradise in as many minutes as her young life could count in years.

Then listening, alert, she heard, with an excited flutter in her heart, the furtive step of Jones upon the stair, and she sprang to her feet, trembling in delicious trepidation as he entered the room. They stared at one another, spellbound, fascinated.



“‘Sweetheart,’ he whispered naively, partly because he didn’t know her other name.”

"Sweetheart," he whispered naïvely, partly because he didn't know her other name.


And she forgot to tell him, surrendering to him her slender, fragrant hands as he knelt there at her feet; and, desperately in love, she gazed down at him, tremulous, half fearful, adoring the adoration in his upturned and worshiping eyes.

So came to Jones his Lady in Haste.



CHAPTER IX

SUI GENERIS

NDER the nose of William Manners the lid of Pandora's Box had now been twitched wide open by the demon of notoriety; around William Manners plagues and troubles of various species were swarming thick and fast. For no sooner did the metropolitan public awake to the fact that there existed on the island of Manhattan a man who, through mental suggestion, was able to influence, mold, and change the character and fortune of any individual to suit his

own whim and fancy, than that same public arose and rushed upon Manners, confident of the millennium as advertised, and determined to secure large slices at bargain prices before it was all gone.

Apparently, everybody in New York desired to interview this young man who, they believed, was not only able to turn them all into whatever they desired to be, but who also might be persuaded to transform other people into other things for their benefit.

Hundreds and hundreds of letters poured into the club for Manners, many containing money or checks with requests for a course of absent mental treatment. Some desired to be endowed with beauty, some with an education, some with love, a few with common sense, and all with the ability to make fortunes within the week.

At first Manners attempted to return money and checks with a polite note of refusal for every applicant, but the letters continued to arrive by thousands; the club servants stacked them up in piles on the floor of his room; the club authorities, astonished and irritated, sent word to Manners that a club was no place in which to conduct private business.

But Manners could neither stop the avalanche of letters nor return their contents. People began to call at the club to inquire for him—odd-looking people—types from the Rialto, Third and Sixth Avenues, “professors” of various “sciences,” fat females elaborately overdecorated, palmists, astrologers, weird flotsam from the reeking gridiron west of Long Acre, shabby curb brokers, book-makers, seedy touts from Forty-second Street, and bright-eyed, bright-cheeked young persons, amply endowed with undulous figures and diamonds, carrying small toy dogs and a heavy scent of violets.

Up rose the governors of the club in their indignation, requesting Manners to consider himself suspended. Then the post-office authorities seized his letters, carted them off on a truck, and threatened to proceed against him for improper use of the mails; two policemen were stationed to watch the club as a suspicious resort, and a committee of very young clergymen waited upon the mayor to protest against Manners as a public menace to morals.

Manners packed his belongings and fled, but Destiny ran after him and whacked him

again for good measure ; and the next morning's papers announced the failure of the Pine Barrens Irrigation Company, William Manners president and principal stockholder. Thus did blind Justice redress the balance ; thus did the normal kick the abnormal ; thus did an old-fashioned, everyday, commonplace world bump William Manners to rebuke him for bringing into it what belonged somewhere between Avernus and Harlem.

Too long had a respectable and unimaginative planet put up with mediums and table tippings and Columbia University ; William Manners and his absent treatment were too much. So the world reared on its hind legs and butted him hard. And a month later William Manners might have been seen seated thoughtfully upon a rail fence, contemplating the rural scenery of northern New York State.

There was scarcely anything there except scenery, unless a tumble-down farmhouse might be included. But even that was a sight in itself.

Pines and oaks and elms ; uplands covered with sweet fern and wild grass ; distant fields of buckwheat and oats ; distant pastures where

cattle stood looking like the newly painted inmates of Noah's Ark—these, and a dusty road, seemed to be the only noticeable adornments of the immediate landscape. Beyond the low hills he did not know what lay. He had rented this lonely little farm with part of the few dollars remaining to him after the crash in Pine Barrens Irrigation stock; and now he sat down for a few moments to catch his breath and recover his self-possession. It was all he could hope to recover and possess.

The outskirts of Coon Corners appeared to be peculiarly fashioned for the retirement, self-effacement, and spiritual meditation of man. With the aid of a scant quart of milk, which he managed occasionally to wring from his cow, he supplied himself with nourishing drink and exercise. A crossroads store at Coon Corners, two miles away, furnished him with moldy groceries; a small garden with recreation, vegetables and weeds, also bait for fishing.

To mitigate the blow and accustom himself gradually to his altered circumstances in life, he always dressed for dinner and served himself with milk, potatoes, bacon, and carrots

in courses. Between courses he played on his harmonica, because, in town, he had been accustomed to restaurant music. The music also served to fill voids—voids of all sorts—as, for example, when he couldn't bring himself to swallow his own cooking, or when the stillness around him got hold of his nerves and clawed them.

After dinner he always removed his evening clothes, tied on an apron, and performed household rites. Then he would dress again and sit on the porch and watch fireflies and listen intently to his cow bell.

This had now continued for a month; he lived mechanically, moved and breathed and had his being automatically; for he was still partly stupefied by the suddenness of the overwhelming calamity which had befallen him.

Little by little, however, the mental numbness began to leave him, and the raw wound began to sting.

One dreadful day and night of despair capped the climax, but that was the worst; he at last fully realized the situation, accepted it *pro tem.*, and seated himself upon the hard top rail of experience, a grass stem between

his lips, his eyes fixed absently upon his cow, who returned his stare, placidly chewing.

"William," he said to himself, "this is not Hell: it is only Purgatory; and you deserve it. For you might have wrought much evil with your spells, William; and the laws of natural phenomena neither govern such antics as you once chose to indulge in, nor do they permit you a place or an existence in a planet where only the normal is consistently possible. Nature, which specifically abhors a vacuum, isn't going to tolerate any other kinds of unnatural phenomena. You produced several, and here you are! You pitiful, tenth-rate sorcerer! William, you disgust me!"

He reached up, twisted off a twig of sweet birch, chewed it, and meditated:

"Uninvited and unsuspected, you gave absent mental treatment to ten people — five men, friends of yours; five unknown and ornamental maidens whom you did not know. You saw these innocent young girls passing the club window; out of idle and devilish perversity, you sent impudent mental waves in their direction. Fortunately, of your ten victims, a kindly Fate has accounted for eight.

They are married and happy. But, William, there are two remaining unaccounted for. You directed a powerful current of mental suggestion at Billy West, with the intention of instilling into that mild and inert youth a passion for pernicious activity — mental and physical.

“Now, that current evidently went astray, because Billy West remains unchanged. It must have missed its object and been intercepted by somebody else. Who?”

Manners chewed his birch twig thoughtfully.

“Who? What person in the world do you hear of as exhibiting irritatingly strenuous activities in matters which do not concern him? To begin at the top, there’s the Kaiser. That powerful mental current may have been intercepted by him, or by — by our own great——”

Horror contorted Manners’s features.

“Heavens!” he gasped; “is *that* the explanation? Does *that* account for it all? Has the greatest of all patriots and moralists and naturalists intercepted that errant current which I directed at Billy West? And has it double charged him with an explosively Jove-

like and omniscient energy which pervades every subject discussed on top of this intellectual hemisphere, from railroads to ruminants, from eels to Ethiopians, from sagas to cinnamons, from trusts to the nesting habits of the speckled tomtit?"

And, as he sat there on the top rail, the poisonous conviction settled upon him—like a horsefly on a colt—that the greatest statesman who ever existed in America had received the full impact of the errant mental current which he had hurled at Billy West. Yes, that part of the great man's greatness was directly due to the reception and bottling up of this powerfully strenuous and stimulating current; what this human marvel had been was as nothing compared to what he would yet be, and do, and say. Railroads should tumble, ambassadors tremble, nations should be afraid, tomtits no longer misrepresented in scientific fiction, and the Ethiopian should be exalted!

Manners's eyes filled with devout and thankful tears.

"Heaven is still good to the Irish-Americans of Dutch descent," he murmured. "No other man could have endured and assimilated

that current; the country would have tolerated no rival. To him that hath shall be given. It is all right. The country is as safe as ever. The faker is doomed!"

Vastly, humbly, profoundly relieved by the solution of this anxious problem, Manners, in his relief and joy, slid from the top rail and frisked about the pasture.

He was very, very happy; he wove a garland of meadow flowers and hung it around the neck of his cow. He went and got his harmonica and played on it, and the cow thrust her large, furry ears forward, listening in bovine amazement to her first serenade.

Manners talked to her—he had only himself and the cow to converse with, and he explained to her excitedly that he was now almost free from sin—that of the ten crimes committed by him only one still remained unaccounted and unatoned for.

"It was a girl," he continued vaguely, laying his harmonica aside on the grass—"a slim, freckled, gray-eyed, sweet-lipped young thing, coming out of her house, evidently on her way to the country for the summer. A legion of maids and butlers and second men and footmen danced attendance about her;

some carried bundles, some satchels, some pet dogs and birds, some robes and traveling rugs. And, looking at her, so pretty and freckled, and thin and helpless to do anything for herself, I sent a good, strong mental wave straight at her.

“‘Young woman,’ I said, ‘get rid of all those servants and learn to do things for yourself if you want your figure to look like a woman’s and not like a boy’s! Use your limbs and muscles! Go out into the fields and rake hay. Go and potter about in gardens, and trim hedges, and milk cattle, and feed chickens, and eat ham and flapjacks with maple sirup, and cook ’em, too, occasionally! Go and hoist up water in the old oaken bucket! It’s full of germs, but they won’t hurt anybody.’ That’s what I said,” nodded Manners to his cow, “and I added my advice that she ultimately marry a farmer!”

The cow was now eating the garland he had woven for her; Manners observed the operation pensively.

“I believe,” he said aloud to himself, “I really believe that my exile and isolation and social excommunication would cease, automatically, if only I could be absolved from

that last sin of mine—if only I could be certain that my miserable interference had not changed and blighted forever the life of this gently bred young girl.

“Somewhere — somewhere — this very moment she is probably raking hay, barefooted! She may be far too frail to endure such a life — endure ham and pancakes, and the smells of barnyards! She may now be sicklied o’er with the pale cast of pie!”

He dropped his head in his hands; all his light-hearted optimism had died out as he remembered what he had done to that girl, scarcely nineteen—a frail, unformed creature, utterly unfitted to endure the fate to which he had so flippantly condemned her.

The cow, having finished the garland, reproduced a portion of it in the form of a cud, and, gravely chewing it, regarded the dejected young man with gratitude.

“To think,” he groaned aloud, “that I deliberately consigned her to this sort of a life! Somewhere, at this very moment, half dead with indigestion, she is probably frying a steak. Somewhere she may be hanging out the domestic wash, her slender body racked with a hacking cough. Or she may be daw-

dling by the roadside with some frowzy lout who is courting her, or she may be already married to a rural sovereign with chin whiskers, whose proudest article of apparel consists of a pair of red braces which he displays at the Sunday dinner table."

The picture evoked overcame Manners.

"It's awful!" he groaned. "I deserve all this. And, as far as I can see, I'm likely to remain in this awful place and milk this infernal cow unless I can find that girl and atone for what I've done by marrying her!"

He rose to his feet wearily.

"But to make her marry a man like me wouldn't be any atonement," he added. "If I did that I'd only aggravate my crime. Great Dingums! Will I ever be able to right the wrong I have done her and get away from that confounded cow and these dinners of carrots and prunes?"

For a while he pottered sullenly about in the garden, picking peas. He shelled them later, then dragged out an ironing board and made preparations to iron the few shirts remaining to him.

It was a laborious task; first he usually burned himself, then several of the shirts.

Starch was a substance which he seemed to have no control of, for what, in a shirt, should have been soft and flexible, became stark and stiff as sheet iron, so that when he wore one of his self-ironed garments it was impossible for him to sit down.

He thought he might as well break in one for the evening, as he was obliged to stand while ironing; so he retired and invested himself in a shirt which seemed in condition to defy armor-piercing shells fired from the south front.

However, he rolled up his sleeves, seized a hot flatiron from the kitchen stove, and, spreading a damp garment across the wobbly board, began ironing away with courage and determination.

From time to time through the open door he glanced out across the pasture. Sometimes he saw a dickey bird, sometimes a butterfly, usually nothing at all except the view.

"Of course," he argued, but with a sinking heart, "this is too awful to continue. *Something's* got to happen: I'll either die of indigestion, or go mad and run into the tall grass, or—or find that girl."

He set his flatiron back on the stove, lift-

ed another, tested it, and began to iron again. And as the smooth, hot metal slid over the bosom of the only shirt remaining still intact, he raised his eyes to see if there was anything to look at outdoors, and became aware of something darkening his doorway—a pink sunbonnet, and two gray eyes under it, and a nose with several adorable freckles, and the oval of a youthful face, and the sweetest mouth he had ever beheld—all at his kitchen door.

There was also a plumply rounded figure in a gingham gown, and two sun-tanned hands as fascinating in proportions as the slim feet visible at the edge of the gingham gown.

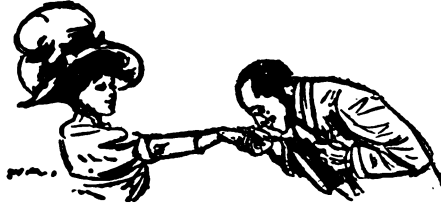
Meantime his iron had imprinted a large burnt spot on the bosom of his best shirt, and the garment had begun to smoke.

But what did he care, staring there transfixed, ecstatically incredulous! The smoke from his scorching shirt mounted like incense from the ironing board; the sunshine behind her sunbonnet spun a glimmering halo, turning the pink gingham to an aureole.

"The goddess—*ex machina*!" he whispered, jaw dropping in holy awe. Then, in the delirium of reaction, he flung flatiron and shirt

into a corner, kicked over the board and the chairs supporting it, hurled the pan of freshly stripped peas into the pantry, pulled down his sleeves, and struggled into his coat.

Meanwhile the girl in the pink sunbonnet was running away. Manners ran after her.



CHAPTER X

EX MACHINA



THE girl was running very fast across the pasture! She took the rail fence with flying feet, gingham gown fluttering, keen for it as some slim thoroughbred. Manners rose grandly to the fence, clearing the top rail in spite of his starched armor, and away he galloped toward the young woodland after her.

"Don't run!" he called out; "I'm not mad, even if I was ironing shirts! I—I'm p-perfectly t-t-tame! I want to tell you something."

Whether or not she understood seemed doubtful; she cast one swift, keen glance over her shoulder, then, jumping the brook, sped up the opposite slope and, with the last remnant of strength, climbed into a maple tree, where she sat among the branches, flushed, breathing hard, her resolute eyes on him as he came toiling up the bank.

For a moment they remained mute, struggling for breath, watching one another. She had broken off a dead branch and held it tightly, one arm clasping the tree trunk.

"Do you think me quite mad," he gasped—"just because in my joy at seeing you I kicked over that ironing board and maltreated a pan of shelled peas? Oh, if you had only understood how I loathe flatirons and green peas! If you had only understood how long I've been obliged to eat my own cooking and iron my own shirts you would not have run away like this!"

She stared at him; slowly the flicker of fear became absorbed in the growing illumination of astonishment.

"Y-you were d-dreadfully abrupt," she said. "You did not appear p-perfectly ra-

tional. I had only come to collect the rent——”

“The rent!”

“Y-yes. I’m your landlady.”

Manners gazed up at her hopelessly perplexed.

“I rented that château from somebody named E. M. Barris,” he said. “Are *you* E. M. Barris?”

“Yes. Ethra Millicent Barris. I live at The Towers. I—my father gave me some farms to play with on my birthday. I never expected to be chased up a tree by my tenant——”

Suddenly, in the rush of relief, she dropped her stick, clasped the tree trunk with both arms, and, laying her head against it, closed her eyes.

“Don’t! Please, please don’t!” exclaimed Manners. “I simply cannot endure to see any woman weeping up in a tree like that——”

“I c-can’t help it,” she faltered; “I’ve got to. If—if I were not in such p-p-perfect health my n-nerves could never have stood what you’ve done.”

“Do you mean my running after you, or

the sight of me ironing?" he asked, mortified.

"B-both. O dear—O dear—I'm so quivery and weak! I—I'd better get out of this tree before I fall out. I don't know how I ever got up here; I feel like a scared and whimpering kitten who has climbed too high and can't get back."

She bent her pretty head and peeped down at the ground between her swinging feet. The ground seemed very far away.

"O dear, O dear," she said, bewildered; "it is my first tree experience, and I don't know how it is done! Do you?"

"A slow slide," he suggested, "is the proper method. You first grasp the tree——"

"How?"

He waved his hands as though repeating a scientific formula:

"You first grasp the trunk with both arms and both knees; then, closing both eyes and clasping the stem of the tree firmly, you descend with a very slow and sedate slide."

"It—it isn't very dignified, is it?"

"It can be accomplished with dignity," he said. "Ironing shirts and shelling peas are

not the ideals of manly sport, yet I managed to engage in both without loss of decorum and self-respect. It depends, not upon what you're doing, but upon your mental attitude toward your task. If one understands how to do it, one can stand on one's head without loss of dignity."

She seemed to be rather impressed by his philosophy; she leaned over, looked at the tree trunk, and crossed her ankles.

"Ultimately," she said, "I shall be obliged to descend, and I may as well do it now. . . . Would you mind walking out of these woods?"

He started at once.

"B-but who is to catch me if I f-fall?" she added.

He came back.

"However, I must take my chances," she continued, looking fearfully at the ground; and he turned and started toward the open.

"And if I fall and am dreadfully injured, it will not be *my* fault——"

He halted.

"It will be *your* fault," she said with tremulous vindictiveness, "for chasing me up a tree. And—I can't come down as long as

you are there; I *won't* come down as long as you are not there. The problem, then, is how to get me out of this tree; and *I* can't solve it. Can you?"

He stared up at her for a moment; then clasped his head in his hands, struggling with the problem.

"The thing to do," he said, "is to use logic. Reason, not emotion, solves problems. Let us begin at the very beginning, if we are to find some sort of a solution——"

"The beginning," she said coldly, "was when you ran after me——"

"I beg your pardon. The beginning began with your running away from me. I couldn't have run after you if you hadn't first run——"

"No, that is *not* the beginning," she insisted. "First of all I saw you ironing——"

"Wait, please! First of all I *was* ironing, even before you saw me. Let us be logical and accurate, if we are going back to the fountain head of cause and effect."

"If we are going back as far as that," she said, "let us go still farther. To begin, then, you rented my cottage——"

"One moment," he begged; "there was a

cause for my renting that cottage; and, if we are going back to the real beginning of things, let us begin with that."

"I don't see," she said, astonished, "why your motives for renting that cottage could interest me, or have any important bearing on the problem of getting me out of this."

He stood very still, silenced — not by her logic, but by the sudden impact of a new idea.

Looking down at him she waited, swinging her crossed feet gently. She was no longer afraid of him or of her situation. She had, at his first word, recognized in him the sort of man she had been accustomed to. It had been only the mechanical and mental difficulty of stopping her mad stampede that had landed her up a tree before she even understood how she got there—a purely automatic flight, obeying physical impulse before the brain could telegraph "Stop!"—like a locomotive overrunning the station in spite of the brakes.

Almost from the first, looking down at him from her perch, fear had fled, leaving a faint reaction. Then calm confidence returned; she examined him leisurely, perfectly convinced of her safety.

And now she looked down from aloft with a smile almost friendly, encouraging him to mental effort.

"How to get me out of this tree," she repeated. "You got me into it. I can't come down if you're not here; I won't come down while you *are* here. You got me up. Logic must help me down. How is it to be done, Mr. Manners? Surely not by discussing the motives which induced you to rent my cottage."

"Yes," he said, "that is exactly the way to begin our logic."

"But that happened before you ever even saw me——"

"No, it didn't."

She opened her gray eyes wider.

"Did you ever see me before you glanced up from your ironing?" she asked, surprised.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Early this spring."

"Where, Mr. Manners?"

"Coming out of your house on Fifth Avenue, opposite the Lenox Club."

"O-h! . . . Yes, I live there. . . . Where were you?"

"In the club window—hatching deviltries!" he said bitterly.

"D-d-deviltries!" she repeated. "W-what in the world do you mean, Mr. Manners?"

"I've got to go farther back than that spring day to tell you," he said. "Shall I do it?"

Amazed at the pallor and desperation in his face, she took a firmer clasp of the tree trunk and gazed down at him.

"Is it very awful—what you are going to tell me?" she asked.

"Very. Shall I?"

"No. Yes."

"Shall I?"

"No. Yes. I—if it becomes too dreadful for me to hear I—I'll tell you w-when to stop."

"Well, then," he said hoarsely, "I'm the most terrible kind of a man you ever heard of."

"O-oh!" she echoed faintly, but expectantly.

"I-I'm horrible, monstrous; I'm a menace to decency, a peril to civilization!"

"Y-you don't look it, M-Mr. M-M-Man-ners."

"That's the sickening part of it. I'm a decent-looking fellow. Don't you think so?"

"Y-yes."

"With agreeable bearing and presence?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"The sort, in fact, to whom you are accustomed in New York?"

"P-perfectly. I—anybody would be inclined to like you, Mr. Manners."

"Thank you," he said gloomily. "That is the awful phase of it. What I look like is one thing; what I am is this: A man once wealthy, now ruined; once popular, now feared; once innocent, now guilty!"

"Mr. Manners! *What* are you guilty of?"

He said: "Do you believe that it is possible for a human being to possess himself of infernal powers? Do you believe it possible that a man can, by mere exercise of will, project mental waves which are capable of molding, modifying, changing, completely transforming the characters and desires of other people?"

"No!" she said breathlessly.

"Yet the fact remains that I can do and have done it. Ten people, on whom I tried my first experiments, prove the statement.

One by one I gave them absent treatment to correct deficiencies of character. They had not the slightest idea of what I was doing; indeed, five of them I did not even know by sight when I undertook their cases."

He paused, passing his hand wearily over his brow. The girl looked down at him, fascinated.

"Fortunately," he continued, "nine out of my ten victims have come to no harm through my villainous meddling. Indeed, strangely enough, they have found their heart's desires fulfilled through what I did for them—these nine victims of my hideous experiments. Heaven was indeed good to me, even in punishing me by sending me here, crushed, bewildered, penniless as I am, for I have found *you* again!"

"Found *me*? Again?"

"Yes. Listen to me, and promise me that you will not fall out of that tree in your amazement and indignation. Will you promise, Miss Barris?"

She instinctively clasped the trunk tightly with both arms. "Yes, go on," she whispered.

"Then—do you ever rake hay, milk cows,

shell peas, fry steaks? *Do* you? Or ever eat pancakes and maple sirup? Speak!"

"Y-yes; I do all those things, Mr. Manners."

"Did you *ever* do them before that day in early spring when I saw you entering your carriage? *Did* you?"

"N-no."

"Do you *like* to do these things—*now*?"

"Y-yes."

"Didn't you actually hate the very idea of doing such things before that day in early spring?"

"Y-yes."

"Then," he demanded solemnly, "why do you do 'em now? Why do you like to do 'em? Why do you now desire pie? Why do you digest it? Why are you physically healthy and vigorous and mentally wholesome and happy? Why are your arms no longer as thin as pipe stems, and why are——"

"Mr. Manners! *What* do you mean to convey to me by this very p-p-personal inventory of my physical and mental characteristics?"

"You know," he said gravely.

"No, I don't know. If—if you mean to

try to frighten me into believing that you are responsible—that you—did—this——”

“You know I did.”

“I don’t! I don’t! I’m not one of your—your dreadful mental experiments, even if I have suddenly found p-pleasure in wearing pink sunbonnets and g-g-gingham d-dresses! Even if I have found—somewhat suddenly—that it’s p-p-pleasant and agreeable to rake hay and set hens and m-m-milk the l-l-lowing kine!”

Pink-cheeked, defiant, she clung to her tree trunk, facing him with tremulous courage.

“You didn’t do all this to me!” she repeated. “I am not afraid that you did! You couldn’t have done it, even if you had been wicked enough to try; you couldn’t do it now, even if you tried with all your might.”

“Tried what?” he asked gently, for the girl was becoming very much excited.

“Anything—tried anything on me—make me, in spite of myself, slide down this tree, for example! I—I defy you to make me do it!”

“Do you really challenge me?”

“Yes, I do! I don’t believe in your powers; I won’t believe in them. If you could



“‘I defy you to make me do it!’”

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the committee who have been appointed to study the problem of the

exercise all kinds of powers, you wouldn't look so helpless and perplexed when I tell you to get me out of this tree."

"But—but you refuse to come down while I'm here, and you refuse to come down if I'm not here."

"Certainly I do!" she said tauntingly; "but that ought not to perplex a gentleman of such unusual and occult talents as you possess. Mr. Manners, the problem remains, I believe, to get me out of this tree. You have employed logic; you have gone back months to begin, logically, at the beginning. Now, if you please, either your logic, or your—ahem!—magic, ought to start me earthward. Proceed!"

He looked up at the bright, flushed face above; she returned his gaze out of her pretty gray eyes. Her mouth was maliciously sweet; the two freckles on her nose adorable.

"There's a way to get you out of a tree," he said. His voice was not quite steady.

"Thank you"—mockingly—"I am waiting to be wafted to earth."

"I want to ask you a question first."

"Dozens, Mr. Manners. Begin."

"You will not be offended?"

"I hope not."

"I mean if no offense is meant?"

"No. . . . What is the first question—before you waft me to earth?"

"Are you engaged to be married to—to—a farmer?"

"No. I suppose you do not mean to be impertinent."

"You know I don't," he said, looking her so straight in the eyes that a deeper tint of color crept into her tanned cheeks.

"No," she said slowly, "I know you could not be rude. What is the next question? You have the privilege of a dozen."

"Then—*would* you marry a farmer?"

"I—why—if I were in love—yes!"

"A *poor* one?"

She dismissed the financial aspect of love with a shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"I see," he said with a catch in his breath—"poor or rich, you'd marry a farmer, if you loved him."

She nodded, surveying him serenely.

"You—ah—perhaps, prefer a farmer to a man of any other—ah—profession?" He strove to command his voice, but it shook.

"Perhaps," she said.

"Do you?"

"Y-yes," very cautiously.

He waited a moment to control his voice, then: "*I am a farmer,*" he said.

"Yes?" innocently.

"Yes, I am. I have a cow, some accursed vegetables, and a stray hen or two. Where the hens are now I don't know; but they're mine if they're still on earth. Besides that, I have some mining shares worth nothing now, but which are due to rocket skyward in about a year. Other assets are a few dollars, unlimited ambition and energy, some badly burnt and worse starched shirts, and no debts. I—I wish to ask you something."

"Ask it," she said, dangerously calm.

He moistened his lips, touched his forehead with his handkerchief, and, looking directly at her, said:

"I never before saw a woman whom I could care for." And, being truthful, he added, "I mean as much as I care for you. I could easily fall desperately in love with you. You could make me love you without trying. A smile—the first glimmer of friendliness in your gray eyes would do it. It will probably happen, anyway."

She waited.

"C-can you ever—learn to care for a man like me?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Manners."

"If—if you could, I'd get you out of that tree in a moment."

"The price is too excessive; I prefer the tree, Mr. Manners."

"But—good Heavens! If you don't marry me, a farmer *pro tem.*, you are liable to marry some genuine and dreadful chin-whiskered, hay-raking, shambling rustic."

"Mr. Manners!!!"

"I can't help it! I *know!*" he exclaimed desperately. "I treated you for that; I gave you absent treatment for it! I suggested that you marry a farmer."

"That was very, very impudent of you," she said hotly; "but I have already told you that I refuse to believe in your powers. I defy you to influence me by mental suggestion! I—I challenge you to make me do one single thing through the exercise of mental suggestion!"

Her angry, beautiful face flushed as she spoke; she bent forward on her perch, braving him.

"I *do* love you," he said obstinately.

"I can't help it," she retorted. "Besides, it's ridiculous to chase a girl up a tree and sit at the bottom and make love to her."

"Ridiculous or not," he said, "I do love you. I love you enough to risk being ridiculous. I love you too much even to think of mentally suggesting that you love me a little in return."

"That is perfect nonsense, Mr. Manners!"

"N-nonsense?"

"Certainly. Just as though you could mentally influence me to love you, if you tried for a year!"

"I could do it in a minute!" he exclaimed hotly.

"And I defy you!" she retorted. "Here I am, sitting upon this branch, unable to get away. Try it, Mr. Manners!"

The bright, excited, and scornful challenge stirred him to excitement.

"You don't know what you are risking," he said. "I—I could make you care for me if I wished to. I could get you out of that tree before you knew it, if I wished to. Don't challenge me again, unless you wish to risk more than you desire to."

She laughed mockingly and swung her feet to and fro.

"I give you full permission to try," she said.

He was silent.

"Shame!" she added, "to let such a challenge pass!"

Still he was silent.

"And, if you can succeed in taking me down out of this tree without my consent or knowledge," she continued, "I give you full permission to make love to me—and make me fall desperately in love with you—desperately, unreasoningly, blindly. Besides, I could not help falling violently in love with a man who really could do such things."

"Even with *me*?" he asked, looking straight up at her.

"Even with you."

"Very well," he said, turning a trifle pale. "I am going to begin. Please place both arms rather tightly around the trunk of that tree."

She laughed disdainfully, but complied. He stood very still, rigid, silent, looking up at her. For a few seconds she watched him, scornfully confident; then his features seemed

to blur a trifle, and she opened her eyes wider. But the face and figure below grew vague and hazy.

"Hold very tight," he said gently. And she heard his voice and obeyed, dazed.

"I think—I think you are sleeping," he said. She did not answer; she no longer heard him.

Then he sprang into the branches and climbed swiftly upward, and very, very gently unclasped her arms from the tree trunk. She was not heavy, but the descent was slow and perilous as he climbed lower and lower, stepping from limb to limb, his slumbering burden clasped tightly in one arm.

At last he hung by his free arm from the lowest branch, looked down coolly, and dropped.

And now she lay back against the base of the tree, eyes closed, pink sunbonnet fallen back, adorable lips half parted, her tanned hands lying limp in her lap.

Manners stood watching her.

"I could love you," he murmured, "too much to make you care for such a man as I am. I—I *do* love you, and I leave your heart as free of love as when I first laid eyes on

you. . . . So you may wake now—gently—happily—care free, heart free. . . . Wake, Ethra!”

Slowly the gray eyes unclosed. Meeting his they opened wider, languid, smiling, unafraid. Then she raised her body on one arm, looked around, upward, then turned her head swiftly, eyes dilating and clearing with comprehension.

The next moment she sprang to her feet, cast a swift glance up into the branches, caught her breath, and, facing him, took an unsteady step backward against the tree trunk.

“You—you *did* do it!” she gasped.

“Yes. You must not be afraid.”

“I—I am.”

“You need not be.”

“I *am*! I—I dared you to do it. You have done it. I d-dared you to m-make me love you.”

“I did *not* do *that*!”

“O-oh!—I don’t know—I don’t know whether you have done that or not!” she cried. “You could have; I defied you to; I offered to let you. If you did not do it, *why* did you not?”

"Because I love you."

"Then why didn't you?"

"Because I love you."

"Oh!"

She looked at him, still a little dazed, still frightened, uncertain.

He said in a low voice: "Do you now believe all that I told you?"

"Yes—oh, yes, I do."

"All?"

"Yes, all."

"About the mental treatment I gave you on that fatal day last spring when I saw you entering your carriage?"

"Yes, I believe it."

"And—and that you still stand in peril of marrying a farmer—a thing of overalls, whiskers, and pitchforks!—an absurd and revolting parody on——"

"D-don't let me!" she stammered, moving impulsively toward him. "You—you won't let me do such a thing, will you, Mr. Manners?" still advancing, both little hands outstretched.

"I can't help it," he said miserably. "I can't reverse mental treatment; I don't know how. All I can do is to modify it in a

measure by directing it more definitely toward some designated individual."

"Then—then d-direct it toward s-s-some individual, Mr. Manners. Don't leave me with this promiscuous rural terror to haunt me! Don't go away and leave me this indefinite horror—menaced by the entire clodhopping population of the United States!"

"What shall I do?" he asked, profoundly affected by her dismay.

"Oh," she pleaded, as he gently took her outstretched and pathetic hands, "it is the horrid uncertainty that I cannot endure. You have destined me for the b-b-bride of some farmer. If I've g-g-got to marry a farmer I want to know what he's like, whether he wears his coat in the house, whether he uses a knife for a fork! Oh—oh, this is too dreadful—too—too dreadful! I—I'm afraid—afraid!"

She broke down, innocently concealing her tear-stained face in the first convenient nook that offered. It chanced to be the scorched shirt front of Mr. Manners. He thoughtlessly put both arms around her. Then they both became absent-minded, for he mentioned her name several times as "Ethra," and "Sweet-

heart," and her arms lay most carelessly around his neck, and she offered no explanation of the phenomenon.

"D-darling!"

"W-what?" she sobbed, although she had never before answered to such an indefinite cognomen.

"D-do you hate me?"

"N-no."

"I—I didn't know," he faltered.

"W-well *I* do, and I *don't*."

With which strangely paradoxical observation she managed to find her handkerchief and dry her tears. Then she raised her head and looked up at him.

A curiously absent-minded expression crept into their eyes; their actions, too, were utterly illogical. However, they said absolutely nothing. They couldn't.

At last her pretty lips found an opportunity.

"I wonder," she said, "how we can do such things . . . as though we had been accustomed to them. . . . Dear, you had no need to employ your talents on me; I—I wasn't really afraid to come down; I was only afraid you'd go away if I did. . . . And—and, dearest, I—I be—I b-b-began to love you up

in the tree—a little, just a little. . . . I think I am a trifle tired. . . . Shall we sit here under our blessed, blessed tree?"

He looked hopelessly into the gray eyes.

"Darling," he said, "I—I can't sit down in—in this g-g-garment. Don't ask me to go into details, only the—the starch——"

She gazed at her lover in infinite pity. "I think I understand," she said very softly.

And together they passed out into the sunshine, his arm around her waist, her lovely head nestling against his shoulder.



THE END

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